

**Sikhism
and
Its Impact on Indian Society**

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Preface

There should be an intimate relation between religion and science. The former strives for the reunion of man with God and lays down, that God is truth and truth is God. Science has also been defined as systematized knowledge for discovering truth. Hence religion as well as science has a similar destination and their proper co-ordination is essential for realisation of the cherished goal i.e. truth. Religion when separated from science degenerates into superstitions and aimless rituals. Similarly, when science divorces itself from the moral aspects of life, which religion has helped mankind to develop, it deprives the human beings of the virtuous qualities like mercy, sympathy, restraint and co-operation. A scientific outlook purges religion of blind faith and lends it a universal approach. Science, under the influence of religion, when used for peaceful purposes, becomes in the words of Louis Pasteur, the best mode of divine worship.

An attempt has been made to describe the preachings initiated by Guru Nanak Dev and their impact in a scientific manner.

The text was first published by the S.G.P.C. Amritsar in 1971. Its second edition was brought out in 1999, with the addition of Chapter V, Miri-Piri : A Historical Perspective, as my humble contribution to the celebration of Tercentary of Khalsa.

For sharpening the interest of young readers, a set of questions under the caption 'Exercises' has been added to each chapter. The parents and teachers may guide them accordingly.

Hazara Singh

I

Sikhism

Sikhism is the latest among the oriental religions. It was founded in the Punjab, which has been the meeting place of many civilisations and races ever since the migration of Aryans into India. It is a simple philosophy of life, which does not consider the life on earth as an illusory dream. It prescribes that life should not be wasted in unreal and abstract expectations after death, but be devoted to selfless service of mankind.

Sikhism differs distinctly in its inception from other religions. Its founders, the Ten Gurus, did not claim themselves as prophets.¹ Their preachings were not presented as an exclusive divine gospel. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the scripture of the Sikhs, contains works of such religious teachers as believed in the oneness of God, regarded all human beings irrespective of their caste, creed, gender and colour as equal and were convinced that even secular activities can be sanctified by leading a purposeful life. According to Sikh tenets all places are equally sacred and a person cannot achieve salvation through pilgrimage alone.² Sikhism defies the three tests stressed by theologians to which a creed claiming the status of religion should conform. They lay down that a religion

*must be founded by a prophet sent by God to earth
specifically for that purpose ;
whose word, thus, becomes an unimpeachable divine
gospel; and*

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1. He who calleth me God, will for sure burn in the fire of hell. I am but a devotee of the Supreme, having been sent to witness His Play. (Guru Gobind Singh)
 2. (a) If salvation could be achieved through a dip in holy tanks and rivers, frog which is an aquatic creature would have been saved from the cycle of birth and death. O mortal, in spite of your pilgrimages you will remain subjected to this cycle like the frog. (Asa Kabir)
(b) The gods and goddesses are worshipped, O brother. What ought we beg and what can they give? The stone bathed in water, O brother, sinks down in it. (Guru Nanak Dev)

the place where he is born gets sanctified as the holiest shrine on earth for his followers.

Sikhism does not believe in one exclusive prophet, does not stress on one absolute gospel³ and does not prescribe any single place holier than others.

The words 'Sikh' and 'Guru' literally mean disciple and teacher respectively. Sikhism is a rational approach to life, which decries blind faith, eliminates superstitions⁴ and does not regard life as a mere empty dream. It was founded by Guru Nanak Dev who was born in 1469 A.D. and its inception was completed by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth in his line of spiritual succession. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* was compiled by the fifth of this line, Guru Arjan Dev. They imparted by precept and practice dignity to the down-trodden, restored their lost hope, invested them with the long denied worth and thus transformed them from a meek and helpless flock into people having no fear of death, but dedicated to selfless service of mankind. A Sikh submits himself to the will of God without falling a victim to superstitions. He does not fear death and is ever ready to embrace it for defending virtue from being engulfed by evil.⁵ He earns his own livelihood and thinks it a sin to live on offerings.⁶ He prays for the welfare of all as he hates none⁷ and above all he is a saint, a soldier and a worker. This code of conduct has been symbolised through five 'Ks', and has been described in detail under the heading 'Foundation of the Khalsa'.

3. The Tenth Guru conferred right to the Sikh congregation to refer an issue, in the event of any doubt about it, to the verdict of five chosen ones.

4. Get rid of all thy superstitions and fear. (Guru Nanak Dev)

5. O God bestow me with such a blessing that I may never shun to do a virtuous deed. (Guru Gobind Singh)

6. Grabbing that, which is the earning of another, is like beef for a Hindu and pork for a Muslim. (Guru Nanak Dev)

7. (a) Eversince I found society of the virtuous and the noble, I forgot the distinction of thou and I. None appears to be a stranger or an enemy to me. (Guru Arjan Dev)

(b) Only fools and idiots try to suppress others. (Guru Nanak Dev)

Exercises

1. State the names of principal religions of world, specifying the founder, scripture and holy of holies of each.
2. What is the place of worship of each religion called? Find out the salient points of each.
3. Why is Asia called the light of world?
4. Why had Punjab been the meeting place of many races and civilizations?
5. What is origin of the word 'Punjab'? How many Punjabs are there at present? To which country do they belong?
6. Distinguish between a lunar and a solar year. Draw a list of birthdays/martyrdoms days (whichever is observed) of various prophets/founders by consulting the Gregorian and Bikrami (lunar) calendars.
7. Make a list of holy places, associated with Sikh religion, in context of their geographical location. Find out the historical importance of each.
8. Why are Sikhs called 'The Khalsa'?
9. Find out the oldest and the youngest Guru at the time of installation. Also ascertain the lineal relationship of Eighth and Ninth Gurus.
10. State the names of Sahibzadas referred to in the Sikh Ardas. How did they embrace martyrdom?

II

Indian Society before Guru Nanak Dev

Almost all the evils of Indian society and the misfortunes of India can be attributed to the introduction of caste system. When the Aryans migrated to India, they had to face stiff resistance from the native Dravidians. Introduction of caste system at that time was an expediency, so that the migrants might be able to devote requisite attention to the pursuits of education, statecraft, trade, agriculture and other allied activities. To begin with the duties were assigned to various citizens on the basis of aptitude, intelligence and valour. But as the conditions stabilized, birth and not worth became the exclusive criterion for determining the social as well as professional status of a person. This sowed the seeds of most of our political and economic evils.

Education became the monopoly of Brahamins, the highest caste. They did not have to work for their livelihood and gloated on offerings. The Kshatriyas, the martial class, assumed political power. The working classes, Vaishyas, were kept illiterate, because their low caste did not entitle them to any benefit of education and privilege of statecraft. The Shudras, the lowest members of society, who were predominantly either the natives or crossbreds of the conquerors and the vanquished, had no rights, but all obligations of menial work. The Brahamins began to be regarded as sacred and the Shudras as untouchables.

A society denying equality to its members fails to forge itself into a nation. People who are proud of their birth but ignorant of their worth do not become conscientious citizens.

The down-trodden sections of society, which are burdened with all sorts of obligations but denied corresponding rights, do not develop any love for the land where they are extended such a sub-human treatment. Caste pride and clannish affinities did not permit the Aryans to forge themselves into a strong nation, in spite of the fact that they had occupied one of the richest parts of earth. A country cannot maintain its sovereignty for long if all of its citizens

do not regard it as their collective duty to defend it from foreign aggression. As political privileges were not equally shared so any threat to territorial integrity of the country was seldom considered a cause obligatory to all to desist. A society devoid of feelings of nationalism is no better than a crowd. That is why who-so-ever invaded India found victory waiting for him.

When manual work and knowledge get compartmentalized, science and technology cannot develop. As the working classes were denied access to education, with the passage of time they became illiterate and shockingly ignorant. Because the Brahamins lived on offerings of their followers, they exploited the latter's ignorance by preaching all sorts of superstitions. As they had not to earn their livelihood, their knowledge tended to get detached from temporal life. It became metaphysical and started attaching more importance to life after death. Worldly life began to be regarded a temporary phase. Consequently people ceased to feel the pinch of poverty, ignorance and ignominy.

As neither knowledge was secular in its outlook nor did the educated classes think that they owed any obligation to work for the welfare of society, everybody began to bother about his individual salvation. The enlightened few retreated to forests and mountains fearing that the worldly temptations would stand in their way of achieving salvation. These recluses, bearing long hair on their heads and growing flowing beards as marks of saintliness took shelter in forestly abodes fearing that allurements of women and other worldly attractions might detract their attention. This had been a timid as well as an escapist outlook; timid in the sense that they avoided women due to lack of confidence in their moral restraint and, escapist, because they could offer no alternative for this natural, but much maligned, relationship. Thus man began to shun his responsibility and woman began to be shorn of respect due to her.

In the absence of any co-ordination between knowledge and other pursuits of life, even methods of warfare did not tend to become modern. The armoury remained confined to arrows, swords, spears and axes. The soldiers began to believe more in charms than

their own valour. The dark superstitions floated by priestcraft hindered the flourishing of trade also. People were told that it was a sin to sail over sea. The orthodoxy of caste beliefs coupled with such superstitions as discouraged all adventure and mixing with the outside world made our people inert, fatalist, passive and bigoted.

Exercises

1. What is social equality? Describe as to how it had been/is still being denied in various countries in reference to birth, colour, race and gender.
2. In the context of Sikh Ardas, find out as to how the Sikhs believe in human equality and universal brotherhood.
3. What did lead to the lowering of position of women in Indian society?
4. Why have been the economists calling India a rich country inhabited by the poor?
5. What harm does get done when brain and brawn are not co-ordinated?
6. Why did the priestcraft regard it a sin to sail over the sea? Do you agree with that advice? If not, why?
7. Describe the shortcomings of inert, fatalist, passive and bigoted people.
8. What is escapism? What harm does it do to society?
9. List the important rights and corresponding obligations of human beings.
10. State the glaring superstitious which the priestcraft floated to exploit the simple-minded masses.

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III

Guru Nanak Dev

Nanak Dev was born in 1469 to Kshatriya parents at Talwandi, a village about fifty miles to the north-west of Lahore (now in Pakistan), which began to be called thereafter as Nankana Sahib due to its association with that path-finder for humanity. Reference to the caste of his parents has a historical significance. All major movements against barren rituals and oppressive caste system were ushered in mostly by the Kshatriya born, viz. Lord Mahavira (599-527 B.C.), reformer-founder of Jainism; Gautam Buddha (563-483 B.C.), founder of Buddhism; and Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539 A.D.), founder of Sikhism. The last among them was not a prince but rose from grass-roots. His knowledge about the plight of people was first hand and as such his observations made a direct appeal to their hearts, heads and hands, the co-ordination of which for purposeful activities, led to an unprecedented social awakening and moral transformation.

The Hindu society had been caste-ridden and believed in social inequality, adoring Brahamins as touch-me-nots, but condemning the menial sections as Shudras or untouchables. People, who get denied social equality and human dignity, fail to forge themselves into a nation. The Brahamins i.e. the priestly class gradually introduced numerous beliefs in the form of myths, superstitions, useless rituals and harmful prejudices. Women used to be regarded as inferior to men and the so-called holy shunned them considering them as source of temptation. Even travelling over sea was preached to be a sin for discouraging contact with people outside India for they were looked down upon as impure, *melachhas*.

The Muslims in spite of their observing equality among themselves have been intolerant towards others, condemning them as infidels, *kafirs*. They believe in oneness of God while the Hindus are polytheists i.e. worship God in many forms and ways. Thus the Hindus are idol worshippers and the Muslims have been acclaiming

themselves as idol breakers. The latter too in practice do not consider woman equal to man. Guru Nanak Dev disapproved the prevailing religious narrow-mindedness, prejudices against women and the exploitation of masses by priestly classes.

Path Shown by Guru Nanak Dev

Guru Nanak Dev showed a new path by giving the call of Unity and Fatherhood of God which in its observance recognises equality of human beings and their universal brotherhood. The *mool mantra* i.e. the basic belief of the new religious code, is :

*“There is one God,
Eternal Truth is His name,
Creator of all universe,
Without any fright or fear, hating none,
Without any form, not begotten.
Self-illuminated and the Enlightener
By the grace of Guru, made known to humanity”.*

The common parenthood of God implies that all human beings, irrespective of race and colour, constitute a universal fraternity. The Divine image as Eternal Truth, free of fright and hate, means that ignorance is sinful and prejudices are baseless. As God does not have any form, it is not right to worship Him as an idol. The belief in His Parenthood and in His Existence as Eternal Truth keeps enlightening the human beings. These precepts when put into practice lead to,

‘Truth is great, but greater still is truthful living’.

Missionary Travels

Guru Nanak Dev, the great explorer-cum-teacher, undertook four missionary travels;

1499-1510 (eastwards - Hardwar, Assam, Bengal and Orissa);

1511-1514 (southwards - Lanka, Kerala, Gujrat and Sindh);

1515-1516 (northwards - Kashmir, parts of Russia and Tibet) and

1517-1522 (westwards - Arabia, Iraq, Iran and back to Punjab)

for preaching his message of love, truthfulness and self realisation.

He settled thereafter at Kartarpur on the bank of River Ravi till he left his mortal frame.

Compositions

Guru Nanak Dev composed about three thousand stanzas including the soul inspiring hymns like *Jap Ji, Asa Di Var, Dakhni Onkar, Sidh Ghost* and *Bara Maha* (Thukari). The language used by him for his compositions was that of people among whom he lived, hence, the effect of his teaching was direct and immediate. The imagery in his verses reveals his love for nature and lends them lyrical elegance.

His works reflect three different stages. The first period resounds with revolutionary fervour directed against barren rituals and hypocritical clergy. The sermon which he gave to his family priest who had been brought to put on him the sacred thread, *janeu*, a mark of high caste :

*‘Make mercy thy cotton, contentment thy thread,
Continence its knot and truth its twist,
That would make a true thread for the soul’*

serves as an apt illustration of his crusade against superstitions and exploitation under their garb.

He impressed upon a Muslim qazi that the continual prayers seek to be complemented with continuous righteous conduct :

*“Five are the prayers,
Five the hours to offer,
Five their different names.
What are true prayers?
The first is truthfulness,
The next, an honest endeavour,
the third, an invocation to God for good of all,
The fourth, a sincere heart,
And the fifth, devotion to God.
Sustain thy prayers with your actions
To claim yourself devotee of the Lord”.*

The second phase (1499-1522) covers his missionary travels and depicts his endeavour to gather knowledge and glean truth by

mixing with people of different religions and regions. The works of that period deal with the reality of God and the relation of human soul with Him. They are a source of perpetual enlightenment for those surrounded by material possessions and worldly temptations. The inspiring song which sprang from his lips during his visit to Assam (Kamrup) :

*“Were a mansion of pearls erected
and inlaid with gems for me;
Pefumed with musk, saffron, sandal
and fragrant roses to confer delight!
May it not be that on beholding these
I forget Thee, O God,
and not remember Thy Name
My soul burneth without Thee”*

reveals the importance which Guru Nanak Dev attaches to self-restraint and virtuous conduct.

The third phase (1523-39), while he had settled at Kartarpur, reflects his rich and varied experience in the form of belief in the Inevitable Will, obligation to good actions, observance of social ethics, spontaneous love for nature and the sanctity of body for ensuring lofty conduct.

*His exposure of exploitation of the masses by the
parasitical priestly classes ;
elevation of women by enlightening the recluses
and sages as to why condemn women, the
progenitors of us all;
revelation to the mullahs at Mecca that God’s abode
is not bound with any particular direction and
confined to any one exclusive place; and above all,
slection of his heir on worth, not birth*

revealed a new path to humanity in the form of a pure and purposeful life.

Household Sayings

Many a couplet from his hymns have become household sayings and, thus, keep people on the right path. Here are a few

illustrations :

- i) conquest of mind is conquest of the world.
- ii) Truth is great, but greater still is truthful way of living.
- iii) Wealth can be amassed through sinful deeds only, but it does not go with the dead.
- iv) Grabbing that, which is the earning of another, is like beef for a Hindu and pork for a Muslim.
- v) Says Nanak, only that day one becomes poor, when he forgets *The Nam*.

Exercises

1. Request your elders to tell you the stories about :
 - i) Sacha Sauda
 - ii) Offering water to the far off fields
 - iii) Bhai Lalo and Malik Bhago
 - iv) Transformation of demon Kauda
 - v) Encounter with Babar
 - vi) Punja Sahib (Hasan Abdal)
 - vii) Selection of Bhai Lehna as heir
 - viii) Cremation of the Guru.

Find out the moral underlying each episode. Wherever possible locate their parallels in history.
2. Who were Mardana and Bala?
3. Gather information about Sikh shrines built at Nankana Sahib.
4. What had been the association of Guru Nanak Dev with Sultanpur Lodhi?
5. There are two towns with the name of Kartarpur in the Punjab. Locate the one on map where the Guru settled after his missionary travels.
6. Develop the significance of :

i) <i>Nam</i> (Divine Word)	ii) <i>Kirat</i> (honest toil)
iii) <i>Dan</i> (charity)	iv) <i>Ishnan</i> (cleanliness)
v) <i>Sewa</i> (service) and	vi) <i>Simran</i> (worship)

as envisaged/preached by the Guru.
7. What are the story books which offer historical record of

- various precepts and practices of Guru Nanak Dev?
8. What are the other religions which preach oneness of God?
 9. With the help of atlas prepare a sketch route of the missionary travels of Guru Nanak Dev.
 10. Bhai Gurdas (1551-1617) eulogised the birth of Guru Nanak Dev as :
'With the advent of Satguru Nanak Dev, the fog caused by superstitions disappeared and the world got enlightened'.
 Dr Mohammed Iqbal (1875-1938) concludes his poem 'Nanak' with the couplet :
 'The call of oneness of God rose from the Punjab
 An accomplished person awakened India from stupor'.
 Develop these tributes to Guru Nanak in the form of an essay.

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IV

Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev

Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606 A.D.), the Fifth Nanak, made a distinct contribution to the advancement of tenets of Sikh faith as evolved by its founder, Guru Nanak Dev. Weeding out of superstitions, observance of purposeful secular activities, practice of religious tolerance, love for mankind, respect for women and recognition of worth instead of the stress on birth have been the salient precepts, preached and practised, by Guru Nanak Dev all over the sub-continent :

*when the modern means of transport and communication were not available;
 when might and not right was in force ; and, above all,
 when darkness of superstitions coupled with pride
 of caste superiority had degenerated Indian society.*

Foundation of Harmandir

Temples and mosques were then the main places of worship and entry to them was restricted to the Hindus and the Muslims respectively. Temples open towards east and the mosques face towards west, in which direction, Mecca, the birthplace of Hazrat Mohammed is situated. Guru Arjan Dev founded Harmandir, Temple of God, at Amritsar, popularly called Darbar Sahib or Golden Temple these days. It opens in all the four directions, reiterating thereby, as Guru Nanak Dev demonstrated to the mullahs at Mecca, that God being omnipresent should not be considered to be bound to any one particular direction. It welcomes people belonging to all faiths because monotheism (belief that there is one and only one God) implies that human beings, being the children of one Almighty Father, constitute a universal fraternity irrespect of their caste, colour, race and gender.

For laying the foundation stone of Harmandir, Guru Arjan Dev invited a Muslim Sufi, Mian Mir. It was a far-sighted step because it not only demonstrated that the new faith regards all human

beings as equal but also affirmed that it extends equal respect to all God-fearing people irrespective of their religious beliefs. The precept of secularism, which is so much discussed and stressed these days at academic, legislative and judicial forums, was practised in letter and spirit by Guru Arjan Dev as early as 1589. Langar or community kitchen is part and parcel of a gurdwara. Every visitor, high or low, is enjoined to interdine there. This had been an effective step in abandoning the discrimination perpetuated through the practice of untouchability. Service in the kitchen is complementary to prayer which implies that true worship lies in the co-ordination of hands, head and heart. The educational philosophers refer to this concept these days as 'Three-H'.

Compilation of *Adi Granth*

Guru Arjan Dev undertook alongwith the strenuous but meticulous task of compiling the *Adi Granth* for giving to the new faith its sanctum sanctorum as well as holy scripture.

The Guru got collected the compositions of Indian saints Hindus and Muslims, which embodied expressions similar to those of Sikh tenets. Three tests were prescribed for the selection of texts by saints for inclusion in the *Adi Granth*, viz., such works :

***should preach oneness of God;
should neither advocate communal hatred nor
incite religious fanaticism; and
should not deride women.***

In addition to the hymns of his four predecessors and his own, the *Adi Granth* compiled by Guru Arjan Dev contains selections from fifteen sufi poets (*bhagats*) and twenty bards (*bhatts*).

The *bhagats*¹ include a weaver, a shoemaker, a barber and a butcher, which holds that it is not birth but lofty thoughts, practised through righteous actions which determine the worth of a person.

1. The *bhagats* or saint poets include Hindus as well as Muslims covering the *bhagati* era (12th to 16th century). *Bhagat Kabir* (weaver), *Sheikh Farid* (sufi dervaiish), *Bhagat Namdev* (calico printer) and *Bhagat Ravi Das* (cobbler) are major contributors.

Most of the *bhatts* had been periodically attached to the Guru Darbars.

The hymns comprising the *Adi Granth* are arranged in thirty one different *ragas*, musical patterns. A precise method was followed in their setting; first the *shabads* by Guru in their chronological order, followed by thier *chhands*, *vars*, etc. presented likewise. The compositions by Gurus in each *raga* are followed by those of *bhagats* and *bhatts* in the respective tune.

Gurmukhi script was adopted for transcribing *Adi Granth* so that the sacred texts be passed on to people in a language they could easily understand. Till then Sanskrit had been regarded to be the most appropriate language for writing holy texts. Because Sanskrit had been the monopoly of Brahmins, who did not favour its being taught to the working classes, it had been reduced to a language for rituals, seldom used for communication. Sermons, when available in the language of people, become an effective instrument for moral transformation and social regeneration.

Baba Budha, a peasant boy, who under the influence of Sikh Gurus had risen to be a saintly person, was appointed as the first *granthi*², when the *Adi Granth* was formally installed in the Harmandir on August 16, 1604 (Bhadon Sudi 1, 1661 BK). It was another epoch-making step because it gave to common people the right to conduct worship and perform rites concerning worldly affairs without depending on the hereditary priestly class.

Martyrdom

Jehangir, who succeeded Akbar in 1605 lacked the latter's liberal outlook. The Muslim fanatics did not favour the new faith as it was emerging as a force readily acceptable to people in spite of its not offering any official patronage. The native priestly classes were afraid of it as their superstitious hold on masses was waning. Jehangir had a personal grouse too, because Prince Khusro, who had revolted against the succession of Jehangir to Mogul throne, was reported to have paid obeisance to the Guru during his retreat. It did not constitute any crime because all devotees were welcome to the abode of Guru. Emperor Akbar had also visited Goindwal in late 1604 and dined in the langar alongwith the congregation.

2. Reciter and interpreter of the holy Granth.

Jehangir records in his *Tuzuk*, memoirs :

'So many of the simple-minded Hindus, nay, foolish Muslims too had been fascinated by the Guru's ways and teachings..... For many years the thought had been presenting to my mind that either I should put an end to the false traffic or that he be brought into the fold of Islam'.

The regal representative at Lahore was accordingly ordered to persuade Guru Arjan Dev to embrace Islam, failing which he was to be persecuted to death. On the refusal of Guru to give up his path he was made to sit on an iron sheet under which fire was burning. Hot sand was poured over his body to break his will through physical torture. He neither sighed nor groaned but chanted calmly:

*"He who chooses the lover's role
Must also choose to walk through death".*

Mian Mir happened to learn about the cruel treatment being meted out to the Guru. He rushed to the place and in his rage was about to curse the persecutors, when Guru Arjan Dev forbade him saying that God willed like that, He died with a composed mind, without uttering any word of ill will. All saints of the past suffered from an inexcusable habit of hurling curses in a fit of anger. Such curses constitute the themes of many epics. None of the Sikh Gurus cursed even their worst foes as they believed in the inevitable will of God.

Religious Persecution

Religion which imparts spiritual guidance to people begins to adopt persecution instead of persuasion when it starts to complement statecraft. It does not exclusively apply to religions which allow proselytism i.e. conversion, voluntary or under coercion. Brahminism holds that religion is inherited by birth and social privileges are assigned according to caste. It is stated in Ramayana that Lord Rama on complaint by a Brahmin beheaded a Shudra, found worshipping, because lower castes were not entitled to perform *puja* (worship) and the king was enjoined to enforce that

code. In Mahabharata, the preceptor Darona Acharya, advised Ekalavya, a tribal youth, to cut off his right-hand thumb, because by mastering archery as martial skill, he had encroached upon the privileges of Kshatriyas.

The Inquisition, Court of Roman Catholic Church, had been inflicting blood-curdling penalties, including burning alive, on charges of heresy.

The Caliphs, as religious heads of Muslim world, allowed bricking alive of children, dragging of women over rough ground with their hair tied tightly to the tail of a trotting horse and torturing of men to death either through skinning or by making them sit on red hot iron sheets or by drowning them after bundling them in a bag containing lime to break their will desisting conversion of Islam.

As per Jehangir's memoirs *ibid.*, his order regarding the execution of Guru Arjan Dev had the sanction of precedents dealing with athiests i.e. *kafirs*.

Impact of Martyrdom

The martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev became the beginning of a new epoch in the history of East. Till then the cult of non-violence preached by Lord Buddha had remained mostly an academic creed. Guru Arjan Dev was the first to practise it. It had a double purpose. It tended to awaken, through brave and patient suffering, the hardened and inhuman conscience of wicked rulers from slumber. It also impressed upon the oppressed and abandoned that non-cooperation with evil and the urge to uphold virtue are essential modes of conduct for retrieving self-respect.

Non-violence and passive resistance were fearlessly preached and effectively practised by the Fifth Nanak more than two centuries before the American polemicist, Henry David Thoreau, who is regarded the preceptor of both Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi, wrote about them in his famous book *Walden*.

Exercises

1. In what way does the lay-out of Harmandir Sahib differ from that of other places of worship?
Find out the other religious shrines built under the benign supervision of the Fifth Master.
2. Describe the association of Muslim Sufi, Mian Mir, with Guru Arjan Dev.
3. i) Who was Bhai Gurdas? What sort of assistance did he render to the Fifth Master in the compilation of *Adi Granth*?
ii) What is the principal contribution of Guru Arjan Dev to the *Adi Granth*? Describe it briefly.
4. i) Find out the names, places of birth and life span of bhagats and bhatts whose compositions have been included in the *Adi Granth*.
ii) The common name Nanak has been used as author of hymns composed by the Gurus. How is the chronological number of each contributing Guru ascertained?
5. Prepare the list of genres ; shabads, chhands, vars, etc. to which the hymns comprising the *Adi Granth* have been arranged.
6. If you are interested in music, find out the significance of different ragas in which the hymns comprising the *Adi Granth* have been arranged.
7. In what manner was the installation of Baba Budha as the first granthi at Harmandir Sahib an epoch-making step?
8. 'The cruelty perpetrated to impose the glory of religion is an irreligious act'. Comment.
9. Explain the significance of passive resistance as moral force.
10. What is the contribution of following to the awakening of mankind?
i) Henry David Thoreau ii) Leo Tolstoy iii) Mahatma Gandhi

V

Miri-Piri : A Historical Perspective

Subsequent to the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev on May 30, 1606 A.D., his son, Har Gobind, was installed as Nanak VI. While Baba Budha, the then headpriest of Harmandir Sahib, performed the investiture ceremony by offering a woolen rosary (*saili*) and a turban, Har Gobind, who was then only eleven, accepted the turban but expressed firmly that instead of rosary he would carry sword, not one, but two. After tying turban in a new style and wearing two swords, he impressed upon the congregation that the sword he wore on his right, symbolised spiritual power (*bhagati, piri*), while the sword dangling on his left stood for temporal power (*shakti, miri*) for resisting tyranny and injustice. Thus the Sikh faith entered its third decisive phase :

first, when its founder, Guru Nanak Dev, defined Eternal Truth;

second, when Guru Arjan Dev laid down his life for upholding that truth; and

third, when Guru Har Gobind adopted sword for defending it.

Historical Perspective

The declaration and adoption of the concept of Miri-Piri was not spontaneous. Guru Arjan Dev had anticipated the imminence of events to be created by the growing bigotry and oppression of the Mogul rulers. Accordingly he had entrusted the bringing up of Har Gobind to Baba Budha to train him in sacred lore as well as weapons so that Sikh faith enters its third phase under an adequately groomed spiritual guide.

The caste system perpetuated for centuries by the priestly classes which determined the position of a person in society according to birth in a particular caste and not on the basis of his intrinsic worth, was more to be blamed for social evils, economic stagnation and political misfortunes of Indian society than the

oppression perpetrated by many a foreign Muslim invader. The latter exploited the basic weakness which exhibited the lack of requisites that forge people into a nation. The lower castes were not only denied education but also not allowed to conduct worship or receive training in weapons. Concepts like social equality and dignity of individual were alien to that caste-based Indian society.

The fanatics among Muslim rulers who considered it a crusade to destroy places of worship of indigenous faiths and coerce or allure the natives to accept Islam were aggressive as well as oppressive. The Non-Muslim populace was accordingly grudging the carrying of weapons, wearing of turban, horse-riding, etc. because they were regarded as semblances of social and political privileges.

Gautam Buddha (563-483 B.C.), founder of Buddhism, denounced caste system and preached social equality about two thousand years prior to the sustained and all-round campaign undertaken by the Sikh Gurus. But his stress on non-violence, which provided no effective alternative in situations posing threat to territorial integrity and political stability of the country, could not stand the tests of time. Two other radical steps adopted by the Buddha i.e. presenting his sermons not in Sanskrit but in Pali, a language, the common people could understand and abolishing the hereditary class of priests proved effective in popularising his precepts and practices. Rigours of caste system started softening. An era assuring tolerance and peace, emanating from the sermon 'Live and let live' set in with two kings, Ashoka (273-233 B.C.) and Kanishka (73-102 A.D.) lending full support to this creed. But Buddhism remained a religion of princes and *bhikshus* (Buddhist monks) and did not become a way of life for the masses, with the result that the revival of Brahminism from within and invasions from abroad pushed it back to stupas and monasteries.

Advent of Sikhism

When Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539) defined Eternal Truth as oneness of God, universal brotherhood of man and love for mankind, he laid corresponding stress on honest toil (*kirat*), thus co-ordinating head, heart and hands for the transformation of a

new human being, who

believes not in superstitions, barren rituals and idol worshipping;
observes ethics like humility and selfless service as a way of living; and
holds it as an auxiliary tenet of his faith to earn for self and share that with the needy.

The sanctification of toil, which aspect the Buddhism did not touch, took religion out of the precincts of places of worship to the populace with the exhortation '*kirat karni, wand chhakna te nam japna*' to earn one's honest livelihood, share the fruit thereof with others and keep praying to God all the while.

Guru Har Gobind (1595-1644) through his concept of Miri-Piri put forth that the hand that holds rosary for praying, alongwith earning and sharing, is under an equal obligation to defend itself as well as the weak against oppression and injustice. It conveyed the message, clear and loud, that just as dependence on offerings is a sin, likewise it is sacrilegious to be cowed down by tyrants. Accordingly he constructed Akal Takhat, the Eternal Throne, in 1609 within the complex of Harmandir Sahib where secular affairs were discussed, physical training was imparted and valorous ballads were sung. His followers started addressing him as *Sacha Patshah*, True King, a glorification of the title *mir*.

Guru Har Gobind suggested that the offerings, as far as possible, be sent in the form of horses and weapons. He began to keep a bodyguard of fifty two armed Sikhs. He also raised a standing force of five hundred trained and armed horsemen under five centurions, Bidhi Chand, Pirana, Jetha, Piara and Langah. A fortress, Lohgarh, was built to fortify the city of Amritsar.

He founded the town of Kiratpur in the Shivaliks. Besides a gurdwara, he built there a temple for the Hindus and a mosque for the Muslims to uphold that all human beings are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise and propagate their respective religious faith. It reminded the rulers of their obligation to treat all subjects alike notwithstanding their beliefs.

These steps started building up a sense of self-esteem among people. The pace of social transformation got expedited which laid the seeds of national awareness unknown to the caste-ridden Indian society. The sages also began to realise the worth of humanism and reality of life instead of withering in seclusion in quest of personal salvation. This prepared ground for the Sikh faith to enter its fourth and final phase i.e. to practise truth as way of life.

Exercises

1. How does the concept of Miri-Piri expose the fallacy of escapist approach to life?
2. Describe the significance of social equality and dignity of individual. Why had they been alien to the medieval social structure in India?
3. What weaknesses, infecting Indian society, were exploited by the foreign invaders?
4. i) How do Miri and Piri complement each other?
ii) Who was Samarth Ram Das? How did his meeting with the Sixth Master at Sri Nagar, Garhwal influence his thinking?
5. i) Describe the difference between a spiritual and temporal Master.
ii) Why is Guru Har Gobind adored as *Bandichhor* or Deliverer?
6. Is the demolition of places of worship of other religions a godly act? Prepare a comprehensive note in relevance to the freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise and propagate freely one's religion.
7. Describe the significance of 3-H as envisaged by the Sikh tenets.
8. Find out the historical significance of other gurdwaras built on/around the Harmandir Sahib complex.
9. Prepare a historical account of the battles which the Sixth Guru had to face/wage subsequent to adoption of the Miri-Piri concept.
10. What were the four phases comprising the evolution of Sikhism?

VI

Foundation of the Khalsa

“Blessed is he who even when he wages war, keeps God ever in his mind”.

Meditation, service and sacrifice constituted warp and woof of the new faith. Barren meditation had not proved itself beneficial to society. Its blending with the service of society imparted a positive approach to life. The adoption of sacrifice gave a purposeful meaning to the worldly activities by popularising death for a cause rather than ending oneself in a vain hope of personal salvation. The perusal of Indian epics reveals that many preceptors and warriors threw away their weapons and forgot the cause for which they had taken up the cudgels, when the death of their sons was correctly or incorrectly announced to them. Bravery lacking the sense of sacrifice is a very unsteady force. But Gobind Singh, the Tenth and last Guru gave a new conception to sacrifice, when he willingly and similingly got his near and dear ones martyred for the protection of truth. He was hardly a lad of nine when a deputation of Brahmans from Kashmir waited upon his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, wailing as to how the Mogul tyranny had rendered their lives unbearable, leaving them with no other option, but to embrace Islam or face an inglorious beheading. After listening to them, Guru Tegh Bahadur remarked that they could be saved, if a pure and virtuous man would be prepared to offer his sacrifice. Gobind Rai¹ remarked instantly as to who could be holier than his father. Imagine a lad willingly depriving himself of the paternal protection and affection for saving truth, society and country from the onslaught of communal bigotry and fanaticism. Later when his two sons in their mere teens died fighting valiantly before his very eyes, he solemnly said :

“O Lord, I've surrendered to Thee, what belonged to Thee”.

Guru Tegh Bahadur was arrested under orders of the Mogul Emperor Aurangzeb and on his refusal to embrace Islam was

1. Childhood name of the Tenth Master

beheaded at the Chandani Chowk of Delhi. He died in composure singing the divine praise :

“Why grieve for that which is inevitable?

Everyone who’s born must also pass away from here”.

After his father had given his life, but not his faith, Guru Gobind Singh resolved that not only the souls of people were to be purified, but their muscles had to be strengthened also for self-defence as well as for protection of the weak. He writes in *Vichitra Natak* :

“For this purpose was I born :

To defend the holy and to destroy evil doers”.

He decided to evolve a new order, which as a last resort, would not hesitate to use sword even for breaking the shackles of social, economic and political subjugation :

“When there’s no other course open to man,

It is but righteous to unsheathe the sword”.

It was the day of Baisakhi in 1699. A very large gathering from all parts of country had congregated at Anandpur. He suddenly rose to his feet with a naked sword in hand and his voice ringing like a clarion :

‘I want a Sikh who can offer his head to me, here and now’.

The congregation got hushed and even bewildered. When the Guru repeated his demand, one after the other five of his devotees kept rising from the gathering. Majority of them belonged to the so called lower castes. He took them each into an adjoining tent according to his turn. After having selected the five who had not the slightest hesitation to sacrifice their lives for the protection of truth, the Guru led them out. They wore long loose yellow shirts, blue turbans, waist-bands, nicker-bockers as underwear and swords dangling by their sides. They looked not only smart, but soldier like, inspiring and dedicated. The Guru called them his Beloved Ones. In a bowl of steel sugar-cakes were dissolved, everyone of them stirring water with a double-edged dagger in turn and singing the holy hymns alongwith. The Guru called it *Amrit* (nectar) and

gave the name of Khalsa (the pure) to his new order. He said :

‘The Khalsa shall not only be war-like, but also sweeten the lives of those whom he is chosen to serve’.

The Guru administered amrit to his beloved ones one after the other and then entreated them with folded hands to do likewise to him. When they hesitated, for how could they administer amrit to him, who was their spiritual guide, redeemer and saviour, the Guru said :

‘It is a new order, I have evolved from this day, where there will be no high and no low. I want to establish this fraternity on the basis of equality by asking to become your disciple now’.

Commenting on this episode Bhai Gurdas Singh remarked :

‘Great is Gobind Singh who is the Guru and disciple rolled into one’.

The Guru addressed his Beloved Ones and the congregation thus :

‘From now on, you become casteless. No ritual, either Hindu or Muslim, will you perform, and believe in superstition of no kind, but only in one God Who’s the Master and the Protector of all, the only Creator and Destroyer. In your new order, the lowest will rank equal with the highest and each will be to the other a bhai (brother). No pilgrimages for you any more, nor austerities but the pure life of the household, yet ready to sacrifice it at the call of Dharma. Women shall be the equal of men in every way. He who killeth his daughter, the Khalsa will not deal with him. You will wear your hair unshorn, like the ancient sages as a pledge of dedication to the Guru; a comb to keep it clean; a steel bracelet to denote the universality of God; an underwear to enjoin chastity, and a steel-dagger for your defence. Smoking, being an uncelan habit and injurious to health, you will forswear. You’ll love the weapons of war, be excellent horsemen, marksmen, and wielders of the sword, the discus, and the spear. Physical prowess will be as sacred to you as spiritual sensitiveness. And between the Hindus and the Muslims, you’ll act as a

bridge, and serve the poor without distinction of caste or creed. My Khalsa shall always defend the poor and deg (the community kitchen) will be as much an essential part of your order as tegh (the sword). And from now on, you will all call yourselves Singhs (lions) and greet each other with Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wahegruru Ji ke Fateh (The Khalsa belongs to God, O, Victory be to God)'.¹

The foundation of the Khalsa was reported to the Royal Court at Delhi as :

'He has abolished caste and custom, old rituals, beliefs and superstitions of the Hindus and banded them in one single brotherhood. No one will be superior or inferior to an other. Men of all castes have been made to eat out of the same bowl. Though orthodox men have opposed him yet about twenty thousand men and women have taken baptism of steel at his hands on the first day. The Guru has also told the gathering : I'll call myself Gobind Singh only if I can make sparrows pounce upon the hawks and tear them; only if one combatant of my force equals a lakh and a quarter of the enemy'.²

Social and political conditions in India underwent a revolutionary change after the inception of Khalsa. Freedom from foreign domination, superstitions, cant and ego, became the urge of each and every heart. Nationalism, a word unknown to the Indian people, surged as a dynamic force. It made no distinction between a temple and a mosque and abolished all privileges of caste, birth, station and creed. It elevated the lowest equal in all respects to the highest.

The significance of the five ks, *keshas*, *kangha*, *kachhera*, *kara* and *kirpan* is further elaborated for the information of those, who may be interested to know as to why the Sikhs observe these

1. Gopal Singh, *Guru Gobind Singh*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, pp. 29-30.

2. Ibid., p. 30.

symbols. In India the saints and recluses grew long hair on head and beard (*keshas*) as a mark of saintliness. But they shunned worldly life fearing that mundane allurements would stand in the way of their salvation. The Sikh Gurus set an example that a man could remain a saint, while leading worldly life. The *keshas* are a symbol reminding every Sikh that he must remain saintly at heart always. The *kangha* (comb) is meant to keep the *keshas* clean. The recluses and saints used to be very unmindful of their outer cleanliness.

In those days, the popular male dress for the lower trunk of body used to be a *dhoti* in the case of Hindus and a loose drawer (*shalwar*) for Muslims. Neither of the two imparted smartness to the wearer. *Kachhera* (shorts) is a convenient as well as a cumberless dress. It adds to the efficiency of the wearer both during peace and war. The Mogul soldiers were notorious for their lack of sexual restraint. They seldom rose to the tradition of a true soldier, who is enjoined to defend the weak and protect the honour of women folk. They recklessly exploited the downtrodden and abducted the fair sex. Guru Gobind Singh made it binding on his Khalsa, that they would remain pure both in body and mind.

Kara or iron bangle has an interesting story as its origin. Under orthodox belief, saturday had been regarded an inauspicious day and people used to offer oil and iron to the priests for warding off evil. Guru Gobind Singh had sent a word to his disciples that they would bring their offerings not in cash, but in kind. The cash offerings had led to the emergence of a class known as *masands*, who were more covetous for money, and less eager to transform souls of the devotees. The Guru took to task this mercenary class of priests. But one saturday, when some followers under the superstitious spell made an offering of iron and oil, the Guru looked expectantly towards his congregation. A few Sikhs rose, utilised the oil as frying medium in the community kitchen and made bangles out of iron. Thus the significance of a bangle (*kara*) implies that its wearer believes in God only, all days are equally auspicious for him and he is out to smash all superstitious beliefs.

The *kirpan* (sword) denotes *kirpa* (mercy) and *aan* (dignity). It enjoins that a Sikh is ever prepared to sacrifice his life for protecting the weak, the oppressed, the dharma and the country. His symbols make him a saint soldier, an enlightened worker and a conscientious citizen.

It is also obligatory for every Sikh to contribute one-tenth of his income (*daswandh*) to Guru's house for the service of society. As the priestly class is forbidden to gloat on offerings and it is binding for every Sikh to live by honest toil, so the tithe offered by Sikhs is utilized for social service such as the opening of schools, dispensaries, orphanages, etc.

Guru Gobind Singh denounced the personality cult in very severe terms. He declared :

“He who calleth me God, will forsure burn in the fire of hell. I am but a devotee of the supreme, having been sent to witness His play”.

His last wish to his followers was that no shrine commemorating his death be erected. He wanted that his life should be followed and not his name worshipped as a tomb.

Idol-worshipping in gurdwaras, in whatever form, is forbidden. *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* has been exalted as eternal and supreme Guru. In case of doubt, the Sikh congregation has been given the right to refer any issue to the judgement of the five chosen ones. Guru Gobind Singh subordinated himself twice to this democratic forum introduced by him. When he founded the Khalsa on Baisakhi Day in 1699, he entreated the Five Beloveds to administer him also the amrit.

Second time, when he was besieged in a mud fortress at Chamkaur and his life was in danger, his five surviving followers requested him to leave the fortress during the darkness of night. He disagreed with them saying that his life was not more precious than those of his followers. But the five passed a resolution and

presented it to the Guru enjoining :

‘Thou hast always said wherever there are five of you, dedicated to me, there I shall also, be, and whatever ye ask, that shall be granted unto ye. Now we command thee as thy Guru, to leave the fort post haste and let us deal with the enemy later as best we can’.

The Guru decided to obey.

The Guru was a great believer in the power of people provided they could be released from superstitions. Once a learned Brahmin, Kesho Das, from Banaras visited the Guru and suggested the holding of a sacrificial fire to invoke the blessings of goddess of power, Chandi or Durga, adored by many as Kali also. Kesho Dass assured that a votary of Chandi would be invincible in all wars. The Guru replied :

‘Even gods and goddesses are subject to the will and authority of God, Who is supreme over all creation. He it is, from Whom we should seek all boons and benedictions. He gives man the power to make or unmake his destiny, if man surrenders himself to Him and fights only for His cause’.

To expose the tall claim of Kesho Dass, he was asked to go ahead. The ceremony lingered on for a year. Then the Guru sought from him as to when the goddess would appear. The Brahmin observed thoughtfully that appearance of the goddess could be expedited if a pious and holy man would offer his head to be burnt in the sacrificial fire. The Guru remarked :

‘Who could be holier than your learned self’?

Kesho Dass was struck dumb and disappeared on a false excuse. The Guru got the remaining material flung into fire. As a strong flame blazed, he came forth with a sword flashing in his hand and addressed the congregation as thus :

‘This is the true manifestation of the goddess of power, the shining steel with which evil is punished and virtue protected and rewarded. He, who is willing to taste its baptism for a

righteous cause invokes, indeed the blessings of God'.

To make his followers believe that they were not a mere flock of helpless people but a reservoir of an inexhaustible power, he said:

'It is through ye that I have won battles ; through your favour that I have distributed bounties to the poor. Through ye it is that all my woes are past, through your favour that my house is overflowing with material possessions. Through your kindness have I smothered my enemies; through your favour am I instructed in wisdom. O, I'm exalted because ye have exalted me, else there were many poor ones like me wandering luckless and friendless'.

This marked the beginning of an epoch where people's will is held supreme. It preceded Rousseau's slogan of equality, fraternity and liberty by more than half century.

Exercises

1. Locate the places on map where :
 - i) Guru Gobind Singh was born ;
 - ii) He was installed as Guru ;
 - iii) He supplemented the *Adhi Granth* ;
 - iv) He left the mortal frame.Why is his birthday (Gurpurab) often observed twice in a Gregorian calendar?
2. How many *Takhats* (Spiritual Thrones) are there? Describe the significance of each.
Why is Damdama Sahib called '*Guru ki Kashi*'?
3. How did Sikhism release the soul of people from superstitions?
4. Make a list of the sacred texts authored by the Tenth Master. Describe the essence of each.
Why did he not include them in the *Adhi Granth*?
5. Who was Banda Bahadur? What mission was assigned to him by the Tenth Master?

6. Who were the forty *Mukatas*? How did they atone for their dereliction?
7. Narrate the incident of Guru Gobind Singh's leaving the Chamkaur fortress.
8. Prepare a chronological list of shrines built to commemorate the association of the Tenth Master with the respective site.
9. Why is Guru Tegh Bahadur adored as '*Hind di Chadur*'?
10. Narrate the significance of the Hola Mohalla festival.
11. Is non-violence an end or one of the means to achieve that end? How and where did the Tenth Master elaborate this concept?
12. Gather more information about Bhai Gurdas Singh.
13. What is the contribution of Jean Jacques Rousseau to the awakening of mankind?

VII

Impact of Sikhism on Indian Society

Two factors helped the growth of nationalism in India; foundation of the Khalsa in the late seventeenth century and the influence of Western system of education introduced by the English during forties of nineteenth century. Both have their distinct contribution to the transformation of Indian society.

Sikhism released the soul of people from superstitions. Once the human mind becomes free it endeavours to break all shackles of social domination, political indiscriminination and economic exploitation. The new order in fact marked the growth of nationalism in India. For the first time people forgot their castes, felt a sense of brotherhood, realised their obligation towards society, repelled the external aggression and forged themselves into a disciplined society. Upto then who-so-ever had invaded India from north-west trampled this land easily, ransacked religious places, dishonoured women and humiliated her people. But after foundation of the Khalsa the tide turned its course. Not only the foreign aggression was beaten back, but the Indians re-established their supremacy upto Peshawar. Sikh soldiers became proverbial for bravery and self-restraint. People in the Punjab enjoyed themselves religious equality, political stability and economic security under the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1799-1839) for the first time after centuries of foreign domination.

The growth of nationalism in Bengal took place under very peculiar and unexpected conditions. Macaulay introduced the English system of education in India to produce English-knowing cheap Indian clerks. But the Bengali youngmen, who got a chance to go to England for education, found themselves quite isolated on return. The English and Anglo-Indian communities did not like to mix with them for demonstrating their superiority.

Their own families were still so steeped into orthodoxy, that these youngmen taught according to liberal Western traditions, felt

ill-at-ease in their own homes. Anglo-Bengali clubs were formed for assimilating the best both in the Eastern and Western cultures. These youngmen were fired with a zeal to develop their country to the Western levels. They played a creditable role in arousing national consciousness in India.

Education in English lacked one vital aspect with which Sikhism is blessed. The former produced people suitable for white-collar jobs only who looked down upon manual work. Sikhism sanctifies labour. Guru Gobind Singh refused to accept water from the hands of a devotee who happened to be the only son of rich parents and had never an occasion to do any work because a host of servants kept hovering around him. The Guru said that he would not accept anything from a hand that had not served another. This small story with a big lesson explains as to why every Sikh is hardworking, adventurous and large-hearted. As the Bengali youngmen taught on Western lines did not learn the worth of manual work, the new awakening did not prove correspondingly beneficial for them. Their collective lot instead of getting bettered witnessed the widening of gap between the educated few and the illiterate many.

The comparative prosperity in Punjab is due to the healthy influence of Sikhism, which holds that work complements worship. Compared with the eastern provinces in India, Punjab suffers from many handicaps. It is quite deficient in mineral resources like coal and iron, which are essential for the growth of industry. It is situated far from the sea, the nearness of which helps in expansion of trade. The monsoons almost get squeezed while they reach Punjab. All these natural and climatic factors had been quite adverse to the progress of agriculture and development of industry. But the love for work, instilled into people of Punjab by Sikhism, has raised this once trampled and trodden province to quite a prosperous and virile state of India.

Natural calamities and political upheavals have failed to demoralise people of Punjab. No scar of the holocaust of Partition is visible anywhere. Though more than four million people got

uprooted in 1947 and a greater part of fertile lands fell to the share of West Pakistan, yet in a brief period of twenty years, Punjab again became the granary of India by 1966. No dislocated person took to begging. There is no field of national activity in which Punjab may not be in the vanguard.

It was people of Punjab who kept the head of India high during the Indo-Pak conflict of 1965. Every Punjabi child, woman and man proved true to the Sikh tradition :

*“He who chooses the lover’s role
must also choose to walk through death”.*

(Guru Arjan Dev)

When a Sikh prays, he does not seek blessings for himself alone, but entreats for the welfare of all. This lends him the magnanimity of mind and imparts him also universal outlook. This is the reason that Punjabis get acclimatized at all places and among all people. They suffer the least from the pernicious feelings like provincialism, regionalism and linguism. This tradition goes back to a story associated with the birth of Gobind Rai. It is said that a Muslim saint, Sayad Bhikhan Shah, observed a strange celestial light when the Guru was born. He bowed and said :

‘God hath sent a new light on this earth’.

He followed the direction of light to see the holy face. He took two covered jars with him, one filled with milk and the other with water, arguing with himself that if the babe would touch the former, he would regard it as the partisan of Muslims and, if the latter, that of Hindus. But the Babe to his surprise laid his hands on both. The Sayad exclaimed :

*‘Blessed, blessed art thou. Oh master of both,
this country needed thee more than anyone else’.*

Every Sikh heart throbs with this secular universality. Every Sikh child is brought up to the tradition of Bhai Kanihya, who was reported to Guru Gobind Singh as serving water to the fallen in the battle irrespective of friend and foe. When the Guru asked him as to why he was offering water to the wounded of enemy even, he replied :

*‘Since you have taught me to make no distinction between
man and man, I do not see amongst the wounded any but*

you’.

Sikh philosophy is secular as well as socialist. When it became a political force all the religions were extended an equal respect. The Guru preached :

*‘Men are the same all over though
each has a different appearance’.*

The secular life has been spiritualised under the impact of Sikhism. It gives the message of full life, enjoining upon the same person to be a saint, a scholar, a statesman, a merchant, a warrior, a tiller of soil, worker in a factory and alongwith the performer of menial duties.

The sanctity imparted to honest labour corroborates the socialist doctrine that he who does not work shall not eat. The injunction

*“He who only earns, but does not share,
he who only gathers joys but does not sacrifice,
he who runs after the transitory allurements of life,
but is not dedicated to God for ever and at all times,
cannot claim the Guru as his own”*

both socialises and spiritualises the worldly life.

Guru Gobind Singh, son of a martyr, laid at the altar of the Supreme not himself, but all his sons, and who-so-ever called him his very own. Through supreme sacrifice, defying the call of blood, he raised bravery to new heights. Knowing fully well the hazards and risks of career in army, every Sikh family sends with pride its young into the armed forces, as it knows that no sacrifice is too big for the defence and honour of motherland. They believe in the prayer of thanksgiving offered by Guru Gobind Singh, when his two elder sons, Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh fell fighting valiantly before his eyes :

‘Lord, I have surrendered to Thee, what was Thine alone’.

These are some of the enviable qualities of Sikhism, which made Pandit Madan Mohan Malivya observe that one member in

each Hindu family must embrace Sikhism.

Exercises

1. Prepare a comprehensive text delineating the growth of nationalism and humanism in Indian society under the influence of Sikhism.
2. 'Truth has never been, nor can be, the monopoly of any single creed'. How does Sikhism corroborate this observation?
3. Why is the wedding ceremony, as per Sikh rites, called *anand karaj*? Develop the text to highlight as to how it strove for the improvement in the lot of women.
4. 'Sikhism had been a social revolution which endeavoured to elevate the underprivileged to their rightful place in society'. Discuss.
5. In what manner Bhai Kanihya had been a forerunner of the movement of Red Cross?
6. How does the Sikh way of life influence in spiritualising secular worldly activities?
7. 'Sikhism is not bound by traditions but allows righteous innovations'. Comment.
8. Make constructive suggestions for communicating effectively the message of universal brotherhood, as envisaged by Sikhism, to people all the world over.
9. How can the Sikh philosophy enlighten mankind going astray under the impact of material progress?

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