

The Sikh Revlution

A Perspective View

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The Sikh Revolution - A Perspective View

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Preface

The Sikh movement was not only an egalitarian social revolution, it was a plebian political revolution as well. In fact, it was far more radical than the French Revolution of 1783-1815. The plebian character of the Sikh Revolution, however, has not received the notice and the attention it deserves.

One of the possible reasons for its neglect is that the Sikh movement was beset by the force of circumstances which prevented it from assuming spectacular dimensions. The battle of Badr has been recognized as a turning point in the history of Islam. Had that battle been lost by Muslims, Islam, as one Muslim historian has put it, might have been 'wiped out for ever from the face of the earth.' In that battle, Prophet Muhammad and his followers had to contend with only about one thousand tribesmen. The Sikh movement, on the other hand, had to struggle for its very existence against the armed might of the greatest empire of its times. The first impulse of Islamic idealism carried its arms, within eighty years of the Prophet's death, as far as a part of Spain. The youth of the Sikh Revolution was spent in ensuring its own survival.

Islam was lucky, too, that it had to counter at its birth, primitive heathenic beliefs, which it was easier to pierce than the hard shell of the elaborate dogma and philosophy the caste had spun around itself. Moreover, the Arabian society was at that time quite close to the level of primitive communism. The Sikh movement had to face the uphill task of overcoming both the caste ideology and the caste system-the most rigid hierarchical social system devised by human ingenuity.

Luther was politically a conservative who condemned the German peasants, but Protestant liberalism overflowed the bounds of religion and influenced freedom of ideas and action in social and political spheres. Likewise, none of the French political thinkers, including Rosseau, had shown any marked concern for the lower classes, but their ideas formed the emotive content of the French Revolution. It was because the innate human yearning for freedom and equality found a ready soil to grow in Europe.

In India, on the other hand, the plebian ideals of the Sikh Revolution did not catch the imagination of the people to the extent it should' have done, because their outlook was warped by the caste ideology and their freedom of action curtailed by the caste structure. It is significant that the egalitarian character of the Sikh Revolution drew more appreciative comments from early European historians or travellers than from medieval non-Sikh Indian historians, who either ignored it or referred to it in derisive language.

Another possible reason is that the appreciation of the revolutionary character of the Sikh movement is screened by prejudices derived from, opposite directions. On the one extreme is the viewpoint that regards religion as an unmixed evil. It cannot even entertain the idea that religion could be a vehicle for the promotion of values of human freedom and equality under any set of circumstances. On the other extreme is the viewpoint which swears by religion but to which the use of revolutionary means for howsoever a noble cause, is an anathema. Historiography has little in common with an approach that would stick to absolute theoretical stands at the cost of human welfare and progress, or with an a priori approach that would try to fit in history into preconceived hypotheses born out of concepts impracticable in human affairs. Toynbee has deprecated the Islamic and Sikh revolutions for their use of revolutionary means for achieving their political missions. It is true that the progress towards human goals has not been linear. Counter-revolution has followed

Revolution like its own shadow. But this is not characteristic of revolutionary movements alone. The ups and downs are common to all human movements because of the inherent limitations of human nature and environmental factors. The Inquisition and the Crusades were launched in the name of Christianity. Buddhism was no less a universal religion, and its adherence to the doctrine of Ahimsa has not been matched by the followers of any other creed. But, it did not usher in the El Dorado of Toynbee's concept. Rather, its adherence to the doctrine of Ahimsa because one of the major factors responsible for its banishment from the land of its birth and, along with the caste, for its enslavement, of the country for about one thousand years. The ideology of the Radical Bhaktas was akin to the Sikh ideology and

had as much potentiality of becoming a universal religion as Sikhism had. The Radical Bhaktas did not even think of entering politics. But their ideology all the same melted imperceptibly into the caste ideology and lost its identity without making any significant social or political contribution at any stage.

Thus, the main purpose of this book is to bring into focus the revolutionary character of the Sikh movement, which cannot be done by viewing it in isolation. The movement has to be judged, as all movements should be, in the light of the broad historical perspective of its contemporary times; and, in this case, especially in that of the Indian social and political context of the medieval era.

I am very much obliged to S. Daljeet Singh, my brother-in-law; S. Kishan Singh (ex-lecturer Dyal Singh College, New Delhi); Prof. Bipan Chandra (Dean of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi) and Shree B .D. Talib, my friend; for their valuable suggestions and criticisms. It becomes necessary to make it clear that the responsibility for the views expressed in this volume is entirely mine, as some of the above mentioned gentlemen do not share my approach to the subject in all its ramifications. I cannot sufficiently express my obligation to S. Daljeet Singh, who took great pains in helping me revise the manuscript, and to whom I owe a good deal of my understanding of the Sikh view of life. Dr. Ganda Singh, the doyen of Sikh historians, Pror. Pritam Singh (formerly Professor of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar) and S. Gurbax Singh (formerly Assistant Director, Punjab Historical Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala) have been very kind in providing me with some of the extracts from Persian manuscripts given in Chapter xviii. Prof. Ram Singh (formerly Reader, Punjab University, Chandigarh), Major General Gurbakhsh Singh and S.B.S. Kumedan have kindly helped me in tracing certain references.

I avail of this opportunity to express my gratitude to my wife, which was overdue, as she has been extending her moral support to me in all my undertakings solely for love's own sake.

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Ghaziabad

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CHAPTER 1

Introductory

The Sikh movement has some exceptional features.

The French Revolution began in 1789. The Khalsa was created ninety years earlier in 1699. The French Revolution was started by the middle class¹, and ‘the blind driving power behind it... was an apparently accidental upheaval of the poor’.² Guru Gobind Singh established the Khalsa with the deliberate plan that the down-trodden, including the out-castes, should capture political power. During the first thrust of the French Revolution (1789 to 1792), ‘the middle class became a privileged oligarchy in place of the hitherto privileged, the feudal aristocracy’.³ When the Khalsa wielded political power for the first time, ‘the lowest of low in Indian estimation’ were equal co-sharers of that authority.⁴

Guru Nanak started his mission round about the year 1486, and the Misals were established in 1764. During this period of 275 years or so, which is the period that forms the subject of the book, the Sikh movement was continuously engaged, first in propagating the ideals of complete human freedom the equality, then in building a society (The Sikhs Panth) based on these ideals, and, finally, in creating through the Panth a political revolution. The purposefulness and the tenacity with which this noble, but difficult, mission was pursued for so long left its own stamp on the movement.

The significance of these developments cannot be fully appreciated unless these are viewed against the background of the system of castes on which the Indian society was based. There is not a single other movement of Indian origin, which owned, let alone having given shape to, the ideal that the sovereignty of

the land vested in the commoners. Similarly, no other movement succeeded in deliberately establishing a distinct social entity outside the caste society. Only the Buddhists had done it, but that was long ago and it was confined to the order of the monks.

The caste, in its fully developed form, is a unique social formation in human history. It is based on the avowed principle that 'men are for every unequal'. The caste system is the most rigid social mechanism devised by human ingenuity to entrench human inequality and hierarchies. Wilson has described graphically how the caste rulers regulate the life of an individual, from birth to death, in its minutest details;⁵ and on one, excepting the ascetics, the Sadhus, the mendicants and the like, could belong to the orthodox religion without being a member of one caste or the other. The caste also covered the entire orthodox society and its spectrum of social, political and economic activities.

The caste has been a great potent factor. It circumscribed the limits within which Indian social, political and economic activities were to flow and also set the direction these were to follow. It raised 'caste status' above 'economic status' and 'political status'. It compartmentalized the economy according to its own social pattern, and prevented the economic forces from attaining to their unhindered growth and stature. The caste system also made political power subservient to priestly patronage. In fact, the preservation of the caste system and the maintenance of the 'caste status' of castes or sub-castes became the overriding motivative consideration of the orthodox society.

No interpretation of an Indian movement in the medieval era, when the caste was operationally supreme, would, therefore, be comprehensive without relating its reactions to, and or its interactions with, the caste ideology and the caste structure of the society. This becomes even more necessary in the case of the Sikh movement which repudiated the caste ideology and the social system based upon it. It is necessary to give an idea of the Sikh movement which repudiated the caste ideology and the social system based upon it. It is necessary to give an idea of the social milieu in which it was born, and the character and strength of the social reaction it was up against. Accordingly, we have devoted four chapters of the book to comprehending the social, political and economic implications and significance of the caste ideology and the caste system.

The advent of Muhammadan rule in India introduced a new

and a major factor having a great bearing on the Indian polity. It almost polarized the masses into two mutually hostile camps. Being a foreign domination, initially, the political domination assumed a new dimension, especially as it involved religious dictation as well. As a consequence of this socio-religious confrontation, human values of freedom and equality were further relegated to the background, and the narrow caste system and religious bigotry gained ascendancy. The Radical Bhakti movement was an attempt to resurrect human values. But this protest of the Bhaktas did not have much of a social impact, because it remained confined to the ideological plane. Three chapters have been devoted to these problems.

The Sikhs movement established the Sikh Panth outside the caste society and successfully used it as a base to challenge political and religious dominance. It even captured political power for a plebian cause. What the Radical Bhaktas did not, the Sikh Gurus did. This development could not be fortuitous. It was because of the Sikh Gurus' view of religion which, regards the tackling of all problems, social or political thrown up by life as a part and parcel of one's religious duty. No understanding of the Sikh movement can be complete without understanding the Sikh thesis, because its political orientation and development was only a projection of the Sikh view of religion. In the succeeding chapters an attempt has been made to interpret the Sikh movement in the light of the Sikh thesis and the Sikh approach to life.

Movements are the resultant of varied and complex forces operating over a period of history. Any attempt to generalize about them cannot possibly escape the blemish of over-simplification. All these varied factors, moreover, often get mixed up in a manner that it becomes next to impossible to demarcate the part played by them individually. One can take note of only the dominating tendencies.

The ideology of the orthodox social order, which the Sikh movement challenged, has been, for the sake of convenience, termed Brahmanism or orthodoxy, and the orthodox social order itself has been frequently referred to as the Brahmanical order, or the orthodox order. Brahmanism, including its later phase of Neo-Brahmanism, may be loosely defined as the socio-religious

ideology which served the interests of the caste order, the Brahmin caste and its allies. The other dominating castes (e.g. the Kshatriyas and the Rajputs), who allied themselves with Brahmanism, played only an insignificant or a subsidiary role in determining its ideological content. The secondary role played by these castes is bracketed with that of the Brahmin caste and is understood to be included in the concept of Brahmanism.

Because of historical reasons, Neo-Brahmanism has become identified with Hinduism. But, Hinduism today is not what it was at the time of the rise of the Sikh movement. The impact of scientific and technological achievements, the capitalist economy and values, the spread of education, the democratic political setup, and many other progressive forces and factors in the world, has generated economic and social forces within India which are bound to bring about a fundamental transformation of the orthodox social order and its ideology. As such, present day Hinduism must sooner or later outgrow the shackles of caste-ridden Brahmanism. Significant changes have already taken place. In fact, the terms 'Hinduism' and 'Hindu' are today coming to assume more of a political significance than static social alignments. These terms now try to cover even unorthodox creeds and sects like Jainism, Buddhism, Jains and Buddhists. However, the mentioning of the words 'Hinduism' and 'Hindu' is unavoidable, especially where quotations have to be given. In such cases, these appellations should be taken to mean Neo-Brahmanism and its adherents in the context of the conditions prevailing before and at the time of the rise of the Sikh movement.

This leads us to make another relevant observation. The reactionary nature of the caste order is a fact to which one cannot turn a blind eye. We should be proud of Indian movements, which fought this social reaction. Buddhism was one and the Sikh movement another. Pride in one's past is legitimate if it gives one inspiration and strength to work for human progress. All movements that work for the welfare of the human race, including the contribution of Islam towards the propagation of egalitarian values, are the common heritage of all mankind. We should not judge progressive movements from the point of view of parochial loyalties or antipathies.

CHAPTER II

The Caste And The Class

The Indian society has fundamentally been based on the institution of caste. Compared to the social formations in other old societies, the caste system is, indeed, a unique social development. Whereas in other societies the social process resulted in the constitution of classes, in Indian alone it culminated in the exceptional system of castes. "There is a wide difference between a profession, or even a hereditary order, and a caste in the fully recognized Brahmanical sense. Even in countries where the dignity and exclusive prerogatives of the priesthood are most fully developed (as in Roman Catholic Europe), the clergy from only a profession, and their ranks may be recruited from all sections of the community. So, too, it is in most countries even with a hereditary nobility. Plebians may be ennobled at the will of the sovereign."¹ "The class and the caste correspond neither in extent, in character, nor in natural tendencies. Each one, even among the castes which would belong to one and the same class, is plainly distinguished from its fellows; it isolates itself from them with a rigour which is not tempered by any regard for an underlying unity."^{1a} The distinction between class and caste is vital, because it led to the development of widely differing patterns of social development.

1. A Unique Phenomenon

Some important features of caste were met with, in rudimentary forms atleast, in some other societies, in some other societies at one time or the other. The early population of Iran was divided into four pishtras analogous to the four Varnas of India.² In ancient Assyria and Egypt, trades were forbidden to inter-marry. Goguest writes 'that in

the Assyrian Empire the people were distributed into a certain number of tribes, and the professions were hereditary; that is to say, children were not permitted to quit their father's occupation and embrace another (Diodorus, Lib. ii, p. 142). We know not the time nor the author of this institution, which from the highest antiquity prevailed almost over all Asia and even in several other countries.³ Hutton has given many instances of analogous institutions, where the parallel to the various features of the caste system is close indeed. He has alluded to a number of their aspects; but, as glaring examples, we cite only some of the extreme cases which approach the Indian outcastes. The swineherds of Egypt could not enter any temple and had to marry among themselves.⁴ Among the Somali of the East Horn of Africa, "the hereditary blacksmiths live apart, and a blacksmith may be killed with impunity by a Masai (but not a Masai by a blacksmith), and no Masai would stop at a blacksmith's encampment... ; his products are impure and must be purified with grease before use, and even the very name of 'blacksmith' must not be uttered at night lest lions attack the camp?"⁵ On the other side of Africa are the Osu in Ibo society on whom there are 'restrictions regarding their intercourse with the free Ibo; their houses are segregated, and to call anyone Osu is a gross insult'.⁶ The Eta in Japan form a community of outcastes. 'So strong is the prejudice against them that the very word eta, if it must be uttered, is only whispered... They were considered sub-human; humbled with the termination - biki used from quadrupeds; lived in separate quarters in the village; had to wear distinctive dress; could only marry among themselves; had no social intercourse with other classes, and could only go abroad between sunset and sunrise.'⁷ The closest example to the Indian outcastes is that of the Pagoda slaves of Burma. 'A Pagoda slave is such for life, and his children and descendants are Pagoda slaves in perpetuum; they cannot be liberated even by a king.'⁸

In this context, we shall confine ourselves to only two major points. Firstly, the instances given above are in the nature of aberrations limited to only a segment of the society concerned. In no country, except India, did these rudimentary caste-like distinctions develop into a system of castes permeating the entire social fabric. Revillout 'comes to the definite finding that, whatever

the nature of these so-called Egyptian 'castes', there is nothing to show that there was any caste system which really resembled that of India...⁹ Hutton writes that the given African instances, "thought analogous to caste in some directions do not constitute a caste system,"^{9a} and that the origin of caste 'has in Burma become stabilized in an undeveloped form or even degenerated so as to affect only a limited part of society, and leaving the main body of the people untouched. For the Burmese as a whole are as free from the working of the caste system as the other peoples among whom analogous institutions have been pointed out.'¹⁰ In the Western Roman Empire, the Theodosian Code attempted to make all public appointments hereditary and to control matrimonial arrangements.¹¹ But, these restrictions were resisted; and in the long struggle between the patricians and the plebians all these distinctions disappeared. By 287 B.C., the two groups acquired equal political and social rights.¹² Nearest to the Indo-Aryans are the Aryans who migrated to Iran. There, the work of the priest was regarded as of the highest merit and that of the artisan as of the lowest. Change of profession from one class to another was allowed only to those who possessed exceptional talent. The priest could marry girls from the lower classes, but did not permit his daughter to marry a man from the lower class.'^{12a} But, all the same, the existence of caste is nowhere attested in the history of Persia.¹³ China, another neighbour of India with a civilization considered older than ours, also had traces of caste-like social exclusiveness. The barbers and their sons were regarded among the pariah classes. They were not allowed to compete for the civil service. Singing girls, play-actors, policemen and boat-men were considered low and had to marry within their own class. No slave could marry a free woman.¹⁴ But, seen in the overall context, the 'Chinese society had been characterized by a remarkable minimum of hard and fast class divisions.'¹⁵ 'By the time of the fourth and third B.C., the idea that social status should be determined mainly by individual merit had become deep rooted.'¹⁶

The second significant point is that, whereas in the other countries the general tendency was for caste-like exclusiveness to melt away into fluid class distinctions, in India alone the social differentiations went on becoming harder and harder till the Indian

society came into contact with the Western culture and economic influences. While Vedic authority is invoked to sanctify the caste system, there is no detailed reference in the Vedas of its social formations. According to even Manu, the twice born Aryans, including Brahmins and Kshatriyas, could take Sudra wives.¹⁷ If the female descendants of the daughter of a Brahmin by a Sudra mother be always married to Brahmin husbands, their offspring in the seventh generation became a full Brahmin.¹⁸ The same impression emerges from the Epics. Alliances between Kshatriyas and Brahmins and the low castes were frequent.¹⁹ At a period still comparatively recent (Chandogya Up. iv, 4-1) the most jealous and exclusive of all the classes, that of the Brahmins, does not appear to have been very scrupulous as to the purity of its blood.²⁰ But, with the passage of time, the castes came 'to isolate themselves sedulously in order to avoid inter-marriage and to keep the rule which prohibits any sharing of meals between them. Each is differentiated by his special hereditary occupation'.²¹ After the decline of Buddhism, when Puranic Neo-Brahmanism became operative, the restrictions regarding connubium and communalism became increasingly exclusive and rigid. Many new restrictions regarding pollution and the like were added. The caste order became the most exclusive stratification of society known anywhere.

All this clearly suggests that there was some strong and singular directive forces behind the Indian social evolution which was not to be matched elsewhere.

2. A continuous Downgrading Process

The aryan immigrants into India are said to have started with the notion that they all belonged to one common ancestor, Manu.²² When the differentiation into classes among the Indo-Aryans did crystallize, to begin with, the Kshatriyas and the Vis (Vaiśyas) could attain to Brahminhood.²³ Manu admits the possibility of a Sudra enjoying kingly power, and Hiuan Thasang mentions instances of Vaishya and Sudra king.²⁴ Of course, from the very beginning, the dark-skinned and snub-nosed natives were despised by the Aryan immigrants. Therefore, the Sudras and the outcastes, who, by and large, comprised these natives, were the worst sufferers of the degrading process of the

caste order. In their case the reason for discrimination is obvious and needs no explanation. But, it is important to note that, in the course of time, the caste process became a self-propelled downgrading operation, which, once started, gradually unfolded itself so as to engulf even the non-Brahmanical sections of the twice-born Aryans.

The position of Kshatriyas, originally among the leaders in the invading community, became later less prominent in the Aryan hierarchy. Barth opines that the rise of great monarchies and the employment of mercenary soldiers, 'must have had the effect of shaking the constitution of the old Kshatriya nobility'.²⁵ This might have been a contributory factor, and there might have been other reasons also. But, there are circumstances which show that the Brahmins made a deliberate attempt to bring about the downfall of the Kshatriyas. The first notable event in this direction was the effort for the monopolization of sacerdotal functions by the Brahmins. In the earliest stage, there was, it appears, no clear distinction between a Rishi and a priest.²⁶ Later, when a priestly class got concretized, sacerdotal functions were not the monopoly of a hereditary class. There was a stage when hymns were composed and sacerdotal functions exercised both by Rajanyas (who were in later ages called Kshatriyas) and by the Brahmins.²⁷ There are even instances of Rajanyas having been spiritual preceptors of Brahmins.²⁸ But, later, sacerdotal functions became the sole monopoly of the Brahmin caste. Manu declared that the Brahmins alone were to teach the Veda and that a Kshatriya was never to usurp a Brahmin's functions.²⁹ It was not merely an empty declaration; it became a fixed rule in the orthodox society.

In the course of time, the dislodgement of the Kshatriyas from their pre-eminent social and political position also followed. In the Buddhist literature, the Kshatriyas are given precedence over the Brahmins,³⁰ indicating that the Kshatriyas were at least no less in social rank than the Brahmins. This is also to be inferred from the fact that the political power was concentrated in the hands of the Kshatriyas; the Brahmins depended upon the ruling class for the political sanction of their social claims. Nevertheless, it is clear that a change in the relative social positions of these two castes did come about somehow. It is significant that Buddhism has been regarded as a Kshatriya revolt

against the supremacy of the Brahmins. Consequently, the elimination of Buddhists by the Brahmins might be viewed as a part of the struggle for vanquishing the Kshatriyas. Moreover, the rise of the Rajputs, who substituted the Kshatriyas, though shrouded in mystery, coincides with the rise of the Brahmanical reaction after the decline of Buddhism. The substitution of Kshatriyas by the Rajputs should have suited the Brahmins; because the upstart Rajputs, as compared to Kshatriyas, depended entirely on the Brahmins for the legitimization of their newly acquired political and social status. Anyway, there is no evidence that the Brahmins ever shed any tears on the eclipse of the Kshatriyas. Rather, their literature boasts how Parsurama, one of their caste, destroyed all the Kshatriyas, then established the four castes and installed another newly formed royal caste in their place.³¹ Manu names the races of Kshatriyas who 'by their omission of holy rites and by seeing no Brahmins, have gradually sunk among men of the lowest of their four classes'.³² In fact, 'the Brahmins assert that the true Kshatriyas caste no longer exists, and those who pass for such are in reality a debased race'.³³

'The Vis (the later day Viashyas) of the Vedas were not limited to a caste, but included everything in the Aryan population which was not distinguished by sacerdotal functions or aristocratic rank.³⁴ They formed the bulk of the free men of the nation. The caste system reduced them gradually to a derogatory social position, very near the border line of the Sudras. According to Aiteraya Brahmana, 'he (Vis) is to be lived on by another and to be oppressed at will'.³⁵ Bhagvadgita (Verse ix.32) 'puts women, Vaisyas, and Sudra in one and the same category of people to whom eligibility to absolution through Bhakti (devotion) is conceded by the Lord'.³⁶ One explanation given for downgrading the peasants, who constituted the bulk of the Vaisyas, is that the process of ploughing involved the killing of worms and insects. If this be correct, it only serves to show the little consideration the orthodoxy had for the bulk of the people of their own Aryan stock, since they could be penalized for ever on such flimsy grounds.

The attitude of the upper castes of the twice-born towards their

own womenfolk strongly highlights the above view. Because, normally people cannot be expected to be more tender towards others than to their own women relatives. In fact, the dealings of a society with its womenfolk is considered to be a fair index of its social progressiveness. And, in the process of downgrading women, it is precisely the ones from the upper castes, which became the greater victims of the oppressive caste rulers and practices.

The period, if any, during which the women of the Indo-Aryans enjoyed equal religious and social rights with men, appears to have been shortlived, because the trend to downgrade their position can be traced to a very early time. Keith writes, 'Women in India has always suffered much from all religions, but by none has she been so thoroughly despised as by the Brahmans of the period of the Brahmanans.'^{36a} 'If treatment of women is a criterion of a civilization, when the civilization of Brahmana texts can expect only an adverse verdict from posterity.'^{36b} Maitrayani Samhita (1,10,11 and iii-6 3) identifies women with evil. The Satapatha-Brahmana (xiv-1.1 21) declares that 'the women, the Sudra, the dog and the crow are falsehood'. A 'woman is never fit for independence'.³⁷ Manu made the subjection of women to men almost servile in character. He laid down (vii.299) that the husband had absolute rights over the wife to the extent of inflicting corporal punishment and of discarding her immediately, she said anything disagreeable to him. A wife has 'to worship, as a god, her husband even though he might be destitute of virtue, or be seeking pleasure elsewhere, or be devoid of good qualities.'³⁸ At a later period, women were even denied the right of the Upanayana ceremony and were forbidden the study of Vedic literature.³⁹ 'Thus was the woman reduced, atleast spiritually, to the status of the Sudra, and this is clearly reflected even in the Bhagavadgita.'⁴⁰ Dubois attests that in his time (seventeenth century) women were given a low place in private life.⁴¹

The prohibition concerning wide-remarriage has the sanction of Manu (V.156-7) and Yajnavalkya (1-75). In actual life, 'it has become a touchstone for the social status of castes; those who practise it are esteemed. Its abandonment by the higher castes causes them to sink in the social scale; its adoption is a means of raising and of

strengthening their position in the Brahmanical scheme of society.⁴²

The system of Sati is not recommended by the Dharmasastras, or by the Smritis. But the practice is a very old one. It is recorded in the Mahabharata and by the Greek writers. Later, it also received some sort of a religious sanction, as it is recommended in the late Vaikhanasa Grihya-surta and the later Smritis like those of Sankha, Angiras, Daksha and Vyasa.⁴³ At any rate, the practice did not excite in the Indian society the same disapprobation and disgust as it did among its Greek witnesses.⁴⁴ Rather the custom was surrounded by a kind of halo and served to raise or maintain the index of social status, as it was more common in the ruling and warrior circles.

Among the upper castes, 'it was considered an outright sin for a girl to reach puberty without being married', and 'the custom which demands child marriage in the case of girls... is regarded as a mark of social superiority. Here again the tradition of the caste exerts supreme pressure.'⁴⁵ This practice is also not without religious sanction. Manu (X.94) prescribes that a man of thirty shall marry a maiden of twelve, or a man of twenty-four a girl of eight; and Yajnavalkya insists that girls should be married before the age of puberty.⁴⁶

The heinous crime of infanticide is not peculiarly Indian in its inception, but here again female-infanticide was indirectly encouraged by the attitude taken up by the religious authorities towards the fair sex. They deplored the birth of daughters⁴⁷ and regarded them as a source of misery.⁴⁸ The abnormal climate of status-consciousness created by the caste system further aggravated this evil. Whereas in other countries infanticide was often the result of poverty, in India female-infanticide was practiced precisely by the upper classes like the Rajputs. "Despite the severe English laws of 1829, as late as 1869, in twenty-two villages of Rajputana there were thirty-three girls and 284 boys. In an 1836 count, in some Rajput areas, not one single live girl of over one year age was found in a population of 10,000 souls."⁴⁹

Two features of this process of degradation are not-worthy. Social reaction developed into a permanent force manipulating the caste society. Because, for centuries on end, it consistently moved in

one direction only, viz., of downgrading people and groups rather than of socially uplifting them. The instances of the upgrading of groups are rare or marginal. The upgrading was approved, as was done in the case of the Rajputs, mostly under compelling circumstances which made it necessary for upholding the overall system. Moreover, it is significant that although foreign elements like the Huns, Sakas, Kushans, etc., could be given a high place in the caste hierarchy at the time of their entry into its fold, it was rare that they could improved their status thereafter.

Secondly, the caste system become a self-propelled automatic mechanism for downgrading groups and individuals. Although originally this system might have been initiated by colour and racial prejudices against the Sudars, and its main thrust continued to be directed against them, the social reaction inherent in the caste order gradually developed into an uncontrolled instrument of degradation, taking in its stride all those who fell within its easy reach. It did not spare even the vast numbers of the twice-born people. Under the impact of this social mechanism, it became the concern of every sub-caste to preserve or improve its social status in the caste hierarchy. As the upgrading of a sub-caste was rare, a sub-caste would now try to improve its social status mostly by stigmatizing and lowering, sometimes on flimsy grounds, the position of its immediate rivals. 'The caste rank of the potters varies widely depending on whether they work at the desk or use the form, or use oxen or the always degrading donkey.'⁵⁰ Within the Kallars in Bengal, those maintaining a price ratio of six seers for the rupee separated themselves from those maintaining a price ratio of ten seers for the rupee.⁵¹ This concern became such a driving compulsion that the preservation of social status was done even at the cost of economic advantage. A higher caste would not take to the vocation of a lower caste howsoever economically advantageous it might be. And, once the supremacy of the Brahmin caste was firmly established, this intra-sub-caste competition became more keen than the inter-caste one. So much so, that even the Brahmin caste got graded into sub-castes of higher and lower social ranks. In this way the caste society split up into more than 3000 hierarchical segments, whose one very prominent feature

was a continuing attempt, by each segment, to downgrade the other. It is true that the higher a sub-caste, the less it was likely to suffer from the degrading process, but, all the same, each one was keenly involved in this perpetual jostling for an advantageous position in the caste hierarchy. In fact, every individual was personally involved, because he was bound down to the social status of his sub-caste. This is how the caste system became a permanent grand operation for downgrading and degrading groups and individuals.

CHAPTER III

The Directive Force

There is no agreement among scholars on the questions of the genesis of the caste system. It is not our purpose to consider it either. All that we seek is to emphasize the undoubted role played by that aspect of Brahmanism, which helped to give shape to and consolidate the caste system. For the sake of convenience, it may be termed the caste ideology. The contribution made by the racial, social, economic, geographic, occupational and other factors towards the stratification of castes is not to be ignored. But, in a generalization like ours, we can take into account only the dominating tendencies, and cannot burden the text with a repetitive mentioning of subsidiary factors. The caste ideology played the dominant part in creating and moulding the entire system for its own purpose and advantage.

1. Economic Considerations

We find that, outside India, the elements of the caste-like rigid social exclusiveness generally yielded place to comparatively fluid class relations. Liberal religious and social ideologies on doubt made their contributions towards this end, but in the main it was the work of economic forces. In India, too, the social and economic interests of the brahmin caste played their part in consolidating, if not in initiating, the caste structure of society. But, how strong the caste considerations were in shown by the fact that, when the caste and economic interests of the people clashed, they would rather forgo economic advantages than the caste ones. Rajputs will not willingly take to agriculture, although it may be advantageous to do so, because they regard the actual operation of ploughing as degrading. It is only the poorest class of Rajput who will himself follow the plough.¹

Ibbetson has given a fairly long quotation from Barne's Kangra Report to show the extent to which the Rajputs of the Punjab Eastern Hills would suffer in order to maintain their caste status. 'It is melancholy to see with what devoted tenacity the Rajput clings to these deep-rooted prejudices. Their emaciated looks and coarse clothes attest the vicissitudes they have undergone to maintain their fancied purity. In the quantity of waste land which abounds in the hills, a ready livelihood is offered to those who will cultivate the soil for their daily bread; but this alternative involves a forfeiture of their dearest rights, and they would rather follow any precarious pursuit than submit to the disgrace.'² It is also very significant that the caste ideology succeeded in moulding the Indian economy to its own pattern of social compartmentalization. Here, it was not that caste-like distinctions melted into class differentiations, as it happened in other countries. Here the process was reversed. In India, class distinctions rather helped to harden caste differences.

The caste, or more appropriately the sub-caste, was not only a social unit, but, by and large, also an economic unit. The members of a sub-caste were usually bound down to follow a fixed hereditary vocation. Economic relationship between individuals belonging to different sub-castes was not on a free and mobile basis, but was governed mainly by the caste considerations. The economic immobility thus created was somewhat less rigid and more variable than social immobility caused by the caste structure of society. But, in the main outline, there was compartmentalization of the economy corresponding to the caste pattern of social segmentation. This compartmentalization of the economy served as a complimentary economic framework for hardening social segmentation. These two, reinforced each other and made the caste structure very rigid and less liable to change.

This linking to the economy to the caste pattern had two important consequences. It fettered the free and smooth development of technology. As the general trend of caste evolution was against any radical change, all innovations in the field of technology were looked down upon with disfavour. 'An innovation in method appeared sometimes as if it were a sin against the craftsman's ancestors.'² It is, therefore, not without reason that the

designs of ornaments, of articles of household use, and of implements used in common crafts, found in the excavations at Texila, are strikingly similar to those commonly used in India upto the 19th Century, i.e. before the Western techniques made some impact.

Secondly, as pointed out by Max Weber, during the period of the growth of cities and the rise of Buddhism and Jainims, the development of guilds in India had reached a certain level. This stage, in many respects, was parallel to that of the guilds in Europe, which culminated there in the establishment of a free economy and a free citizenry. But, without unrestricted commensalism, no medieval free citizenry in Europe could have been possible. In India, restrictions on free commensalism between different castes is fundamental to the caste system. Thus, instead of leading to the establishment of an occidental type of citizenry and economy, the monopoly rule and the rigidity of the caste system 'steered India's social structure — which for a time apparently stood close to the threshold of European urban development — into a course that led far away from any possibility of such development'.⁴ Thus, it is the caste considerations that dominated the Indian scene rather than the economic factors.

2. Colour and Racial Prejudice

Colour and racial prejudices have also been mentioned as being responsible for the formation of the caste system. But, this factor by itself could not furnish the motivating or the driving force behind the continuing hardening of social barriers and the grand downgrading operation of the caste society. It is likely that colour prejudice and racial hatred supplied the initial impulse to the development of social exclusiveness in the Indian society. This notion of the superiority of the Aryan race was quite understandably present all along. It was even made use of for ulterior ends. But, actually, racial distinctions had lost their force by the time Neo-Brahmanism developed, because intermixture of ethnic stocks had already taken place on a vast scale. It is doubtful whether there are sizeable pure stocks of Brahmins and Kshatriyas, let alone Vaisyas.⁴ If anthropometry can be depended upon to determine the race of a people, Prof. Ghurye has shown that 'the Brahmin of the United Provinces has closer

physical affinities with the Chuhra* and the Khatri of the Punjab than with any caste of his own province except the very high caste of the Chattri... The table of Bengal shows that the Chandal,* who stands sixth in the scheme of social precedence and whose touch pollutes, is not much differentiated from the Brahmin... These results are rather odd. Stated in a generalized form they mean that there is no correspondence between social gradation and physical differentiation in Bombay.’⁶ Similarly, the measurements of nasal indexes do not show much distinctions between the untouchable chamar of Bihar, the Holeya of Canarese and the chernuman of Tamil Nadu from the Brahmins of their respective territories.’⁷ Dr. Bhandarkar has come to the same conclusion . ‘There is hardly a class or caste in India, which has not a foreign strain in it. There is admixture of alien blood not only among the warrior classes — the Rajputs and the Marathas — but also amongst the Brahmins. Looked at from the antiquarian or ethnological point of view, the claims of either community (Brahmin or Kshatriya) to purity of blood are untenable and absurd.’⁸

Where inter-mixture of blood takes place on a large scale, racial prejudices were off with the lapse of time. Hence, colour and racial sentiments alone cannot explain the social exclusiveness of the caste society, and why, with the passage of time, it became increasingly inelastic and intensified. Actually, racial distinctions were bound to become blurred with the massive admixture of ethnic stocks. Had the connection between these two currents been direct, these developments should have moved in the same direction and not in opposite directions, as it happened actually.

There is no specific allusion to caste in the Vedic hymns, even though feelings of race and colour should have been at their height at the time of the fresh impact with the natives. Divo-Dasas or the Sudras were the authors of certain Vedic hymns.⁹ ‘There are texts which show that lofty descent is most easily recognized by purity of conduct — to such a degree has the inter-mixture of castes obscured all lineal descent.’¹⁰ ‘It need hardly be emphasized

* An out-caste of the Punjab
An out-caste of Bengal

that Manu's rules allowing Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas to take Sudra wives do not betray any extraordinary horror for the hypothetical black predecessors of Aryans in India.

'It may be pointed out that in Africa, where men of the fair-skinned races did penetrate into the interior in early times, caste has not been formed as in India. If sharp physical difference creates caste, one would suppose that the Carcaseic type would find sharper contrast in Negroad Africa than Aryans in India.'¹¹ Dr. Ketkar concludes that 'All the Aryan race, or the so-called Dravidian race, were Aryas. The colour of skin had long ceased to be a matter of importance.'¹²

Had the interests of the Aryan race been uppermost, there is no reason why the Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and the Aryan women folk should have been downgraded. It is an established fact that there was a long draw-out struggle for precedence between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas in which the latter were worsted. Not only did they lose the race for supremacy, but they, as a class, practically ceased to count as a social force. Had the tussle between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas been confined within the limits of an internecine struggle, one could regard it as a normal occurrence, as was the caste in other societies. But, the Brahmins owned the upstart Rajputs, who were of doubtful Aryan origin,¹³ and who supplanted the Kshatriyas. This upgrading of Rajputs in the social scale is significant, because it was the one major event of raising the status of Aryans of doubtful origin against the main movement of downgrading large sections of the Aryan people. Elements from the Greeks, the Huns, the Sakas, the Gujars, and other foreigners, were given a high social status by being assimilated in the Brahmin and the warrior classes, or in creating some of their branches.¹⁴ Thus a two-way process of downgrading the Aryans and giving a higher status to some of the non-Aryan new entrants into the caste society was at work. This clearly shows that racial considerations along had ceased to be a significant social force.

However, the pretence for the preservation of the purity of Aryan blood was kept up. It was at variance with the facts of life and led to contradictions. The protagonists of the idea do not seem to have been unaware of this, because the very term 'twice-born' implied being

reborn into Aryan-hood, viz., the resurrection of the notion of the purity of Aryan blood after the inter-mixture of ethnic stocks had cast doubts about its validity. All the same, the pretence was maintained even in the face of these contradictions; because the paramount need was for upholding the inequality of the social order which was justified on the supposed superiority of the Aryan blood.

3. Religion

Religion, in its true sense, cannot have anything to do with caste formation or its consolidation. Had it been the driving urge of an impelling common religious faith or doctrine, it should have atleast welded Neo-Brahmanism into one religious whole, and not left it, as it was, a loose amorphous mass of creeds and cults. There is very little in common between Vediasm and Puranic Neo-Brahmanism. Image and temple worship, pilgrimages to the Tirthas, veneration for the cow and abstinence from intoxicants and meat, were altogether unknown to the Vedic Aryans. Linga worship is not mentioned by Fa Hain and Hiuen Thasang.¹⁵ Image and temple worship are surmised to have been borrowed from the Sudras;¹⁶ and Devi, Bhairon and Hanuman worship from, the Dravidians.¹⁷ Some writers go so far as to say that many of the important beliefs and practices of Brahmanical Hinduism, e.g. worship of Siva and Uma, of Vishnu and Sri Yoga Philosophy and practices, also came from the non-Aryan source.¹⁸ Human sacrifice was not characterstic of the Vedic religion, though it was admittedly a constant practice of the worship of Siva and Durga from the time of the Epics downwards.¹⁹ Many deities, religious cults and myths, derived from the races beyond the Brahmanical pale,²⁰ became a part and parcel of popular Neo-Brahmanism.

This process of syncretism, which was a great factor in the development of Neo-Brahmanism precisely is. 'And indeed, the doctrinal fluidity of Hinduism is not incidental but, rather, the doctrinal fluidity of Hinduism is not incidental but, rather, the central issue of "religion" as we conceive it.'²⁰ Obviously, as there was no unity of religious beliefs or practices, religion could

never be the motivating force behind the development of syncretic Neo-Brahmanism and its social system. Although the pretence of deriving Neo-Brahmanism from Vedic sources and traditions was kept up, it had no validity in fact. It was done merely to clothe it with the sanction of Vedic authority and old tradition. As the hardening of caste exclusiveness took place mainly during the hey-day of Neo-Brahmanism, it follows that the real driving force behind the consolidation of the caste system could not be a commonly held religious faith.

4. The Over-riding Compulsion

In the ever-changing scene of the shifting importance of deities, creeds, racial antipathies and other considerations, there was no factor which was persistent. It was the concept of Hindu Dharma. This concept was synonymous or very closely interwoven, with the social order of Brahmanism. Viz., the caste system (Varna Ashrama Dharma). Like the banks of a stream, it determined the limits within which the current of Indian social life must flow and the direction in which it must move. So long as this current remained confined within the prescribed social limits, all varieties and sorts of dogmas, ideas, faiths, creeds,²² customs and practices were tolerated and allowed to be a part of the Hindu Dharma. But any threat to the frame-work of the social order was frowned upon, condemned, or combated against, depending upon the seriousness of the threat posed. This is the basic hypothesis. The interplay of other factors is not ruled out, but this hypothesis explains, better than any other one, many of the main social and socio-religious developments in India in the period of Neo-Brahmanism.

Orthodox Hinduism has been very catholic in the realm of purely religious beliefs. It may even happen that while the father is a shivaist, the son may be a Vishnuist. 'Broader religious tolerance than this in a single religion is hardly conceivable.'²³ Besides Buddhism, the only creed against which orthodox Hindu catholicity of religious belief gave way to violent antagonism was Islam. In the latter case, the antagonism, though not justifiable, is atleast understandable. It was a reaction against the outrages committed by the Muslim conquerors on the very things the Hindus cherished most. But on of the most

outstanding feature of Buddhism is its compassion and tolerance. Compare to the conduct of the followers of the other great religions, the record of Buddhists in this respect is highly praiseworthy. Lord Buddha himself showed respect to Brahmins and Ashoka advocated respect for them in his edicts. Then, why were the Buddhists, of all the creeds of Indian origin, singled out for special punitive treatment, and purged out of the Indian body politic in a manner the human system eliminates a harmful foreign element ?

This hostility could not be because Buddhists were atheists; for Buddha was later accepted even as an Avatara. But even if they were atheists, so were the followers of Sankhya and other orthodox atheistic schools. Moreover, Buddhism and Jainism are far less divergent than the widely different paths of salvation admittedly orthodox.^{'24}

Another reason given for regarding Buddhists as heretics is that they did not recognize the authority of the Vedas, undermined the influence of the priestly Brahmins and rejected Brahmanical ritualism. In this respect, the change of heresy against Buddhism has substance, but its real social significance is not properly understood. What Brahmanism was concerned with was not the divergence from the Vedic religion and practice, because Neo-Brahmanism itself was the result of such a variation in belief and practice. It had virtually broken away from the old Vedic religion, 'Vedas contain nothing about the divine and human affairs fundamental to Hinduism.'²⁵ 'The Vedas rather defy the dharma of Hinduism.'²⁶ In fact, it is such a get-together of fluid religious ideas, beliefs, cults, etc., that 'at the present time it is next to impossible to say exactly what Hinduism is, where it begins, and where it ends. Diversity is its very essence.'²⁷

As such, what was really at stake was not the religious doctrines and beliefs, but the orthodox social order, or the Varna Ashrama Dharma as it was called. 'In contrast to the orthodox sects, the heresy of the theophoratries consists in the fact that they tear the individual away from his ritualistic duties, hence from the duties of the caste of his birth, and thus ignore or destroy his dharma. When this happens the Hindu loses caste. And since only through caste one can belong to the Hindu community, he is lost to it.'²⁸

The 'Varna Ashrama Dharma' derived its authority from the interpretation of the Vedas, other orthodox scriptures, and the old tradition. Therefore, a link, however nominal and formal, with the old scriptural authority and tradition was vital to the survival of the caste order. It was more a matter of form than of content; because, the Brahmins themselves borrowed, or compromised with, or even sponsored cults, practices, and usages foreign to Vedism. But, all the same, for the survival of their social order, this matter of form, or link-up with the old scriptural authority and tradition, was all-important to orthodox Brahmanism.

This is the reason why Brahmanism adjusted itself to Bhagavatism but reacted sharply against Buddhism. Buddhism had succeeded in establishing a separate church, scriptural authority and Dhamma entirely its own. It was not only independent of Brahmanism, but also challenged the parallel Brahmanical institutions. So there was little scope for moulding Buddhism and fitting it into the Brahmanical orbit. Bhagavatism, and other unorthodox creeds, on the other hand, continued to own allegiance to the Vedic authority and tradition, even though in a vague and qualified manner. This made all the difference. It provided an opening through which Brahmanism could work itself into these creeds, use them for combating its declared enemy Buddhism, and so mould them as to adjust them in the orthodox Dharma. This goes to the credit of Buddhists that they did not compromise on the essential values of their Dhamma, whereas the Bhagavatism allowed itself to be utilized for sanctioning caste. The Dhamma of the buddhists, though in practice limited to the order of monks, was based, not on birth and caste, but on good deeds and conduct. These social values of the Buddhist Dhamma were incompatible with the social values of the orthodox Dharma which were based on birth and inequality. Had it been a question of purely religious belief only, orthodoxy might have found a way to adjust itself to Buddhism, as it had done in the case of other unorthodox creeds. But, in the social field, there was little scope for compromise between the Buddhist Dhamma and the Hindu Dharma. If the caste order was to survive, the Buddhist Dhamma had to change or go. Moreover, Buddhism had not only posed a theoretical challenge, but it had attained

political ascendancy over a long period. If it had not, during this period, tried to change the orthodox social order, it was either its limitation or its fault. But, orthodox social order, it was either its limitation or its fault. But, orthodoxy had been lying low and had taken the lesson to heart. When it got an opportunity to come up again, it made sure that the threat to its social order was completely and ruthlessly eliminated once for all.

The above view is further supported by the fact that the hostility of Brahmanism towards different heretic sects has varied almost in direct proportion to the effective threat they posed, not so much to the orthodox creed as such, but to the orthodox social order. From the purely theological point of view, Jainism was no less heretic than Buddhism, but the Jains suffered far less persecution than the Buddhists. It was so because, 'if the necessity arose, Jainism was not unwilling to admit a god of popular Hinduism to this galaxy. Besides, it was also not opposed to the theory of caste. It was thus very much less hostile and more accommodating to Hinduism than other heterodox systems ... The result of this spirit of accommodation was that Jainism has survived in India till today, whereas Buddhism, its twin sister, had to look for habitation elsewhere.'²⁹ Also, when Buddhism itself had ceased to be a serious challenge to the established social order, Lord Buddha was included in the list of Vishnu's Avtaras, although Buddhism had by no means compromised, even at that period, its essential tenets.

It is significant that Saivism, which had been established throughout India in the third century BC.³⁰ (and was the predominant religion in the 7th and the 8th centuries,³¹), or shared even honours in popularity with Vaisnavism³² but which did not stress the observance of caste,³³ and showed comparative independence of Brahmins and Brahmanism, got steadily pushed into the background by Vaisnavism, which was liberal in accepting the caste system and the Brahmins as its ministers.

The hypothesis referred to above also helps us to explain why Brahmanism, which had all along been very particular about sex morality and even upheld celibacy as an ideal, could put up with the Sakatas with their obscene practice, but rejected the highly ethical Buddhists. This hypothesis also explains why the doors of vedic religion, which were closed to Sudras and women so long as they remained in the social field were

opened to them if they became sophists or mendicants, i.e. when they cut themselves away from the general society and their status ceased to be of any consequence to the social order.

It is not our aim to reduce the interpretation of various socio-religious developments in India in terms of a simple formula. We only seek to emphasize that the consideration of preserving the orthodox social order was supreme in determining the direction and developments of even the religious systems. This view is further supported by the pattern of assimilation of alien elements into Hinduism. The motivation on the part of those assimilated, whether tribes, classes, sects, or nobles, was the legitimation of their social and economic situation.³⁴ The precondition for their assimilation was the adoption by them of the Neo-Brahmanical social customs and usages. Two aspects of this process assimilation are note-worthy. First, both the motivation and the conditions for accepting outsiders had not much to do with religion as such; these were primarily social in their nature. Secondly, the more one accepted the anti-social restrictions regarding occupations, contact, table-community and window-remarriage, and adopted customs such as endogamy and child-marriage, heigher the status one got in the orthodox social order.³⁵ In other words, conformity with the caste-system was the central criterion for admission to the Hindu Dharma. The assimilated races, tribes or nobles, found their place only as members of some caste or as new castes.

The potency of the caste ideology in spreading its net and consolidating its hold is further illustrated by the way it swayed, without the apparent use of armed force, southern India where the Aryans had not penetrated in appreciable numbers. This potency will be further confirmed when we consider how Brahmanism succeeded in making political power subservient to the caste status of the Brahmins, and how it engulfed all outside liberal social ideas, trends and movements that ran counter to the inequitous social values of the caste system.

It is important to note that the development of this exceptional social reaction in India, typified by the caste system, was neither accidental nor the product of just inanimate factors. A mighty conscious efforts was indeed necessary to furnish the notion of the purity of the Aryan blood with a veneer of respectability

when it had lost its validity as an actual fact of life and to arrest the process of racial admixture when it had proceeded very far. No less deliberate an effort was needed to uproot the well-established religious and political authority of Buddhism in such a thorough manner.

CHAPTER IV

The Caste Ideology, Its Ideologues And The Institution

1. The Ideology

The fundamental assumption of the caste ideology is that 'Men were not -as for classical Confucianism - in principle equal, but for every unequal'.¹ They were so by birth, and 'were as unlike as man and animal'.² It has to be clearly grasped that this inequality between man and man was in principle, and not merely the result of a gap between man's aspirations and practice that is the common failing of all human organizations, religious or social. Permanent human inequality by birth is the summum bonum of the officially declared Brahmanical ideology. This forms the very basis of its social order. Instead of being akin to a universal father, God himself was made the author of unequal Varans. Prajapati created him (the Sudra) as the slave of other castes.^{2a} Moreover, He was the God of the Aryans only, from whom the Sudras were excluded. 'Everyone cannot obtain this (for the gods do not associate every man), but only an Arya, a Brahmin, or a Kshatriya, or a Vaisya, for these alone can sacrifice. Nor should one talk with everybody (for Gods do not talk with everybody) but only with an Arya.'³ Order and rank of the castes is eternal (according to doctrine) as the course of the stars and the difference between animal species and the human race.'⁴ Therefore, the key to the caste system is the pre-eminence given by it to the caste status; and the key to the pre-eminence gained by the caste status is the sanction it received from the orthodox scriptures, ritualism, old tradition and custom. The last three also had a religious sanction and sanctity.

a) Pre-eminence of Caste Status : The caste status comprised social status, but it was something more than what is generally meant by social status. Ordinarily, social status depends upon the personal endowments of an individual or a group, as also on wealth and power. These could be additional adjuncts to the caste status, but the caste status retained its primacy even without these. Manu declares that whether learned or not, and even when practising undesirable occupations, a Brahmin is a great divinity.⁵ Besides, social status is generally variable. With the loss of political and economic power, status consciousness tends to vanish. Whole classes have been replaced by other classes; races have been known to lose their identity; occupations have risen and fallen in the scale of social estimation; and group bias and prejudices have disappeared altogether, or have been replaced above political and economic status. The wealthiest Bania was lower in caste status than the poorest Kshatriya. The Chaturpatti Hindu king was lower in caste status than his own priest (Purohit) who was economically dependent upon the princes. Shivaji, the embodiment of the solitary successful Hindus revolt against the Muslim political domination, had to go about abegging to the Brahmins for the legitimization of his sovereignty by them. One of the probable reasons why the Maurayas shifted their allegiance to Buddhism might be that within the orthodox religion there was no way for them of removing the stigma of their doubtful caste status and origin. As late as the beginning of the present century, "The Shanans of southern India, in spite of the wealth they have acquired, have no right to build two-storied house, to wear gold ornaments, or to support an umbrella."⁶

Another important feature of the caste status was that it was not confined to a new individuals, groups, or sections of the people. It covered the entire orthodox society. Excepting the mendicants, Sadhu, etc, who cut themselves off from society, 'Before every thing else, without caste there is no Hindu.'⁷ The whole population was arranged in hierarchical caste orders in a pyramid like fashion. Beginning from the top layer of the caste pyramid and going down to its base, each caste layer was superior in caste status to the following ones irrespective of their political

or economic position. At the top end were the Brahmins, 'the gods on earth', and at the lowest end were 'the untouchables', the 'unapproachables' and 'the unseeables'. The position of each layer in this pyramid was permanently fixed. For, caste was hereditary and the position was, by and large, unalterable.

The caste status covered the whole society in another sense also. It transcended geographical limitations. A Brahmin or a pariah in one nook of the country was as such a Brahmin or a pariah in any other part of the land. This way the caste society developed its own pattern of slavery, which led to the enslavement of entire communities by the entire caste society. The slaves in other countries were the slaves of individuals or of a limited number of enslaving groups. The society as a whole had, if any at all, only an indirect interest in keeping them enslaved. The fate of slaves could change with the change in the attitudes or the destiny of their masters. Many a slave won their freedom in Rome, and some of the slaves in the Muhammadan kingdoms rose to be kings. Slavery in the USA came to be abolished wholesale under the impact of Christian liberalism. But, in India, the Sudra was the slave not of individuals or groups, or in one part of the land, but he was the slave of the whole system, the entire caste society. This system of slavery has been guided by the dictum that even if freed by his master, a Sudra is not released, 'for this (servitude) is innate in him; who then can take it from him'.⁸ Abbe Dubois, who worked for a long time among the untouchables and had thus an intimate personal experience, wrote in the 17th Century (after the Islamic and Western liberal influences have had some time to influence the caste society) that, 'in fact, these Pariahs are the born slaves of India; and had I to chose between the status of being a slave in one of our colonies and a Pariah here, I should unhesitatingly prefer the former.'⁹

b) The Authority of the Scriptures : John Muir is of the view that, although the authors of the hymns of the Rig Veda attached a high value to their productions, they did not in general look upon their compositions as divinely inspired, since they frequently speak of them as the productions of their own mind.¹⁰ But, from very remote times, it became the cardinal belief of the orthodox religion that the Veda was 'Aspurshaya'¹¹ (that it was not the work of man), or that these

were self-revealed texts. Had this belief been confined purely to the realm of religion, it would have been quite different. But, it was used as the central pillar on which the super-structure of social reaction was raised and maintained. The Vedic hymns are, by and large, concerned with sacrifices and ritualism, which served to consolidate the position of the sacerdotal class. These hymns also directly extol the priestly class which, as a caste, became inextricably bound up with social reaction. Above all, the authority of the Vedas, and of other scriptures (by lining them with with the Vedas), was invoked so as to consecrate the position of the Brahmins and to sanctify and declare inviolable the caste ridden social system and its retrograde rules.

The oft-cited Purushua Sukta hymns, which is sung by the Rig Vedic and Yajurvedic priests at the time of their principal ceremonies (as if to emphasize its importance), was regarded as a divine ordinance sanctioning the origin of the four castes.¹² The Veda was declared by Manu to be the direct revelation of God (Sruti)¹³, and was to be viewed as the sole source of all knowledge, secular as well as divine.¹⁴ 'Throughout the earlier part, and even in the body of the Institutes, the Dharma Sastra of Manu is spoken of as the inspired exponent of the Vedas, almost of equal (p.18 et al) authority with them; but in the last chapter of this book is a passage (p.359, 190) wherein the Vedanges, Maimansa, Nyaya, Dharma Sastras, and Puranas are called the extended branches of the Vedas.¹⁵ 'All outside it (the Vedas), or not derived from it in the Dharma Sastra by the perfect wisdom of Manu, was human, vain, and false. Unbelief in the Veda was deadly sin; and whoever, in reliance upon heretical books, questioned the authority of the revealed Veda and of the Dharma Sastras was to be treated as an atheist, and driven from the society of the virtuous.'¹⁶ 'Rejection of the authority of the Vedas, transgression of the precepts of the Sastras, and an universal lawlessness, lead to a man's own destruction. The Brahmin who regards himself as a Pandit, who reviles the Vedas, and is devoted to useless logic, the science of reasoning, who states arguments among virtuous men, defeats them by his syllogisms, who is constant assailant and abuser of Brahmins, an universal doubter and a fool, is to be regarded as a child; people

regard that man as a dog. Just as a dog assails to bark and to kill, so such men set to wrangle and to overthrow the sacred books.¹⁷ ‘Abandoning fruitless reasoning, resort to the Veda and the Smriti.’¹⁸ ‘One of the few essentially binding duties of Hindu “faith” is not — at least not directly — to dispute their authority (i.e. of the sacred books).’¹⁹

Manu did not rest content with establishing the divine authority of the Vedas, his own work, and that of other scriptures. His object thereby was to sanctify the caste system and the position of the Brahmins. So he decreed that “the teaching of a Brahmin is authoritative for ‘man’, because the Veda is the foundation for that”.²⁰

That the authority of the scriptures was used to sanctify the caste-system and other retrograde social laws, hardly needs any elaboration. This point has been the main burden of Manava and other Dharma Sastras. Their approach to the Sudras, Viashyas and women has already been noted. Manu claimed that Brahma enacted the code of laws, and taught it to him (Manu), Manu taught it to Bhrigu, and the latter would repeat it to the sages.²¹ He further declared that the soul of one who neglected his caste-duties might pass into a demon.²² The Gita preaches that ‘according to the classification of action and qualities the four castes are created by me. Know me, non-actor and changeless, as even the author of this.’²³ According to another passage in the Smriti (law-code), is the eternal law of duty, and is never found to fail.²⁴ The Dharma-Sutras enjoined that a King has to rely on the Vedas and Dharma Sastras for carrying out his duties.²⁵

Whether the Purushu hymn is a later addition or an interpolation, and whether its interpretation is correct or not, and whether the sanctity derived for the Dharma Sastras and other post-Vedic scriptures from the Vedas is real or fake, is beside the point. In fact, even in the Mahabharata there are some passages which are at variance in their approach to the one quoted earlier; but then parts of Mahabharata there are some passages which are at variance in their approach to the one quoted earlier; but then parts of Mahabharata at least are believed to be derived from the unorthodox non-Brahmanical sources. But, one cannot get away from the hard reality that the scriptural sanctity attached to the Dharma Sastras and the like texts, and to the

inviolability of the laws laid down by them, became a cardinal part of the religious belief of Brahmanism, old and new. The Brahmins came to monopolize the interpretation of these scriptures.²⁶ The Brahmanical interpretation of these scriptures became the main prop for sanctifying and maintaining the caste system and social reaction. Above all, the Brahmanical interpretation of the scriptures in the respect was neither challenged for thousands of years, nor a single voice raised against it from within orthodoxy. Anybody who dared to differ from the Brahmanical view was declared a heretic, and this so-called heresy was the main plank for combating Buddhism and other liberal trends controverting or doubting the validity of the caste system or Brahmanism. 'To acknowledge the authority of the Vedas, as demanded of the Hindu, means, *fides implicita* in a more fundamental sense than that of Catholic Church, and precisely because no saviour is mentioned whose revelation could have substituted new law for old.'²⁷ And, 'Brahmanical and caste power resulted from the inviolability of all sacred law which was believed to ward off evil enchantment.'²⁸

c) Tradition and Antiquity: Closely allied to the sanctity of the scriptures was the authority of tradition and antiquity, which got so mixed up with each other. In actual practice in the orthodox society, the latter came to exercise weight almost equal to that of the former. 'In practice, this (*fides implicita*) meant simply the acknowledgement of the authority of Hindu tradition resting on the Veda and the continued interpretation of its world image; it meant acknowledgement of the rank station of its leaders, the Brahmins.'²⁹ Manu claims that, 'the whole veda is the (First) source of the sacred law, next the tradition, and the virtuous conduct of those who know (the Veda), also the customs of holy men, and (finally) self-satisfaction'.³⁰ 'Ancient Brahmanism cannot be separated from the Veda on the one side, and from modern Brahmanism on the other, and the later, again, is so intimately connected with all the branches of Hinduism that too sharp a division runs the risk of breaking vital connections.'³¹ This link-up of Neo-Brahmanism with that of remote past was not achieved through doctrinal continuity. It was based on claims and assumptions which were sanctified by faith and tradition without subjecting these to logical scrutiny. Summing up the development of Neo-Brahmanism,

Crooke comes to the conclusion that ‘The New-Brahmanism, henceforward to be called Hinduism, was developed in two ways; first, by creation, mainly illustrated by the Epic and Puranic literature, of a galaxy of deified personages, the legends regarding whom were largely drawn from the current folk-lore or popular tradition, and, by a reconstruction of the tradition...; secondly by the adoption of deities, religious myths, and cults derived from the races beyond the Brahmanical pale.’³²

Not only was the tradition sanctified by linking it up with the vedic past, but mere antiquity and authority of age came to surround itself with some sort of a halo. It has already been seen how Manu claimed that the code of laws was created by Brahma and thus gave ante-creation authority to his laws. Puranas made monstrous claims about their chronology, whereas Prof. Wilson’s opinion is, ‘that oldest of the Puranas is not anterior to 8th or 9th century, and the most recent one not above three or four centuries old’.³³ Vishnuswami, the founder of Rudra Sampradaya, lived in the early part of the 15th century; but his followers, in order to give the authority of age to his opinions, state that he had previously existed some 4500 years earlier.³⁴

The tradition, and the halo of authority attached to age, mutually reinforced each other, and both served not only to make the outlook of the people backward-looking, but also to consolidate the social system and make it more rigid and inflexible than it, perhaps, otherwise might have been. The caste order ‘by its nature is completely traditionalistic and anti-rational in its effects’.³⁵ ‘The every day Dharma of the caste derives its content, in a large measure, from the distant past with its taboos, magical norms, and witchcraft.’³⁶

It is stated that Janadagnes cut the sacrificial cake into five portions, while the other Gotras were content with four. The same distinction was also observed in the Gita ritual. At the marriage ceremony, the Janadagnes sacrificed three portions of fried grain, but others gave only two.³⁷ That such trivial distinctions were preserved for thousands of years reinforces Birth’s view that, ‘Nothing ever incorporated in their traditions has completely vanished, and even what has the most modern appearance we may look to find again some day or other in their most ancient movements.

In very few cases only are we likewise able to ascertain which of their ideas are ancient and modern.³⁸

d) Custom, Ritualism and ceremonialism: Custom, ceremonialism, and ritualism do not lag behind in claiming sanction of the sacred scriptures. "The bridge between speculation on the one hand, and ritual and custom on the other, is not so long in India as it is with us. Both disciplines claim to be founded on the Veda, with nearly the same justice in either case."³⁹ The Vedas and the brahmanas, in fact, concentrate upon sacrifice and ritual. Even the Upanisads are a mixture of philosophy, Mantras and ritualism. The importance attached to custom and rituals may be gauged from the fact that a separate body of literature, the Griyasutras (which are, of course, not Mantras), deals almost entirely with these. In the Brahmanas it is the sacrifice that is good-compelling.⁴⁰ 'By sacrifice', says the Taittiriya Brahmana, 'the gods obtain heaven.'⁴¹ According to Atharva Veda, should sacrifice cease for an instant to be offered, the gods would cease to send us rain, to bring back at the appointed hour Aurora and the sun, to raise and ripen our harvests, because they would no longer be inclined to do so and also, as is sometimes surmised, because they could not any longer do so.⁴²

The hymns of the Rig Veda take quite a strong line towards the omission of ceremonial obligations. "Indra, who is the slayer of him, however strong, who offers no libations."⁴³ "The hostile man, the malicious enemy, who pours out no libation to you, O Mitra and Varuna, plants fever in his own heart..."⁴⁴ "Slay every one who offers no oblations..."⁴⁵ "... the sacrifice shall divide the spoils of the unsacrificing."⁴⁶ On the other hand, even the thief the sinner, or the malefactor, who wishes to sacrifice, is a good man.⁴⁷ Hence, the assertion of Manu that a number of Kshatriya races sank among men to the lowest of the four castes on account of their omission to perform holy rites and to see the Brahmins.⁴⁸ Similarly, children, although the offsprings of a couple in the same caste, were likely to forfeit their caste status if the obligatory ceremonies were neglected. A special term Vratyas was used to distinguish them from other.⁴⁹

The Path of action (Karma-marga), one of the three recognised paths of attaining salvation, which was emphasized by the

Vedas and the Brahmanas, was the path of doing prescribed duties of rituals. It was the most widespread of the three paths. Ritualism was not confined to the religious sphere; it governed all aspects of the life of an individual and circumscribed his outlook and action.

The great importance attached to religious and ceremonial observances enable the priestly class to entrench itself in the social system to an extent wholly unknown elsewhere. Even in the Rig Vedic time, the presence of a priest was considered an important condition for the efficiency of the ceremonial. Upanayna ceremony was made absolutely obligatory for the first three castes. Unless performed by the prescribed age, the individual lost his caste. Thus, in addition to the right by birth, initiation, which was called rebirth or second birth, was the door by which one entered the Aryan family. The key to this door was placed in no other hand than that of the Brahmin, because he alone had the right to initiate.

All roads lead to Rome. Ritualism, ceremonialism, and custom also converged towards entrenching the caste order and social reaction. Mutual exclusiveness was predominantly caused not by social, but by ritualistic factor.⁵⁰ Ritual barriers were absolutely essential for caste.⁵¹ 'the Caste order is orientated religiously and ritually to a degree not even partially attained elsewhere.'⁵² That territory only was ritually pure where had been established the four castes.⁵³ As already noted, the dharma, which hinges on the ritualistic duties on one's caste, 'is the central criterion of Hinduism.'⁵⁴

e) Pollution : The notions about pollution, of which the taboo on food is just one aspect, played the biggest role in extending the caste system and in projecting it in its day to day operation. It has been mentioned that colour-prejudice and racial hatred, perhaps, were responsible for lowering the status of the Sudras. But it was not just that. They were considered to be impure by their very birth as Sudras. Their mere presence defiled the air. The inherent impurity in them could not be shaken off by any means. The story of Matanga, a Sudra, given in the Epic, well illustrates the approach of the caste ideology towards the Sudras. Matanga does penance for centuries to regain his lost dignity. Indra on his throne is moved and promises him

exceptional favours; but the one of rise to a higher caste, which the penitent solicited, was impossible. 'Thousands and millions of successive births are necessary to obtain the ascent from a lower to a higher caste', replies Indra.⁵⁵ It was, thus, the notion of inherent pollution or impurity which was mainly responsible for stiffening and making permanent the social exclusiveness against the Sudras.

The concept of pollution did not remain confined to the Sudras. As it originated in the fancy of Brahmins and was not subject to any principle, it was diversified and extended in many ways and directions. Human beings, animals, vegetables, article ways of food and of daily use, occupations etc., were graded in an arbitrarily fixed scale of comparative purity and impurity. What is still worse, this gradation was made an instrument for fixing the social position of individuals and groups in the caste society. The idea of pollution associated with the after-effects of child-birth and the flow of blood at the time of the monthly period of women had much to do with the undermining of their social status. The peasants, who comprised the majority among the Vaisyas, were downgraded simply because ploughing involved the killing of worms. In the classical literature 'the Vaisya is, first a peasant'.⁵⁶ Arian describes the husband's man as respected and as having his rights preserved even during a war.⁵⁷ But, in post-classical times and at present the conception of the Vaisya as a "peasant" has completely vanished'.⁵⁸ He has been, with a few exceptions, pushed to the borderline of the Sudras. 'For a man to lay his hand to the plough or to cultivate vegetables is, ... throughout the high castes, considered to entail derogation.'⁵⁹ Similarly, honoured Vedic professions, such as those of the tanner, weaver, smith and chariot-maker came to be confined in later days to the Sudras.⁶⁰ Castes came to be downgraded because they took to vocations which involved processes or handling of articles considered to be religiously impure. 'The lowest caste strata was considered to be absolutely defiling and contaminating. First, this stratum comprised a number of trades, which are almost always despised because they involve physically dirty work: street cleaning and others. Furthermore, this stratum comprised services which Hinduism had to consider ritually impure: tanning, leather work.'⁶¹ Then there were other castes

which, though a trifle higher in the social scale, are for all that not treated with any respect. The barbers and washermen are looked upon as menials because of the unclean things they have to handle. The potters are also a very low class. The five castes of artisans and the manufacturers and vendors of oil are very much looked down upon. The Mochis or tanners are so much despised that other Sudras would hardly condescend to give them a drop of water to drink. This feeling of repulsion is caused by the defilement, which is presumed to ensue from their constantly handling the skin of dead animals.⁶²

Not only was impurity or defilement believed to be imparted by direct contact, but it was supposed to be contracted indirectly through objects and in an extreme case even through sight. This is what led to the castes of untouchables, unapproachable and unseeables. There are villages or Brahmins to which all other castes were strictly refused admittance.⁶³ Impure castes shunned infectious contact with non-members as rigidly as the high castes.⁶⁴ Unapproachability also came to be meticulously graded. A Nayar 'may approach a Nambudri Brahman, but must not touch him; A Tiyan (toddy-drawer) must remain 36 paces off; a Malayan (i.e. Panan, exorcist basket-maker) must remain three or four paces farther; a Pulayan (cultivator and untouchable) must keep 96 paces from a Brahman.⁶⁵ Not only this. Unapproachability was practised even among the ranks of the unapproachables but not touch a Tiyan, but a Pulayan must not even approach a Panan.⁶⁶

There is a proverb the caste is only a question of food.⁶⁷ The Santlas, a very low caste in Bengal, have been known to die of hunger in times of famine rather than touch food prepared even by Brahmins.⁶⁸ A general criterion of the social position of the caste of a person was as to which of the higher castes would accept water or food from him.⁶⁹ In fact, the notion of pollution in its application assumed innumerable variations and confronted individuals often in their daily life. The grading of professions, crafts and occupations, of which downgrading of some of them is a corollary, was so much an integral part of the caste system that Nesfield goes to the extent regarding occupation as the centre around which the caste has grown up. The pressing of oil seeds

is stigmatized as a degrading occupation in the Code of Manu because it is supposed to destroy life. This seems to have led to the division of the Teli caste into two. The ones who press oil are treated as untouchables, and the Telis who only sell oil will outcastes a member who should venture to press it.⁷⁰ It is not our purpose to go into many details. But it need to be stressed that the idea of pollution was given a distinct religious significance. It spread a wide net-work which directly downgraded existing castes, created new ones, and consolidated social differentiation in the caste society by raising religiously (or magically) tinged insurmountable barriers between different castes.

f) The theory of Avtars and the 'karma' theory : The Avtara theory, or the theory of incarnations or the descent of God, was of momentous importance in enabling Neo-Brahmanism to absorb other systems. On the one hand, it helped Neo-Brahmanism to link itself with Vedism, and on the other it permitted it to own the deities and to assimilate the creeds, religious and cultures of the non-Aryan or heterodox societies. Some of the developments and applications of this theory led to important social implications. Social reaction was tagged on to the fair name of the Avtaras and their authority was invoked to confer divine sanction for the caste-order and social reaction. Lord Rama was said to have cut off the head of a Sudra for the sole crime of indulging in religious rites not allowed to his caste.⁷¹ Lord Krishna was supposed to have asserted that he was the creator of Chaturvarnya.⁷² The association of the authority of Lord Krishna and Lord Rama, the popular Avtaras of Vishnu, with the caste order and the reactionary social usages gave great support to these institutions. The Shastras and the other Brahmanical religious literature had, no doubt, already claimed Vedic sanction for these. But Vedism had ceased to be a living force in the post-Buddhist period, except as an authority for owning formal allegiance. But, Lord Krishna and Lord Rama, who as Avtaras were thought to have come in the garb of human beings to uphold Dharma, had become living realities for the vast multitudes who worshipped them. Sanction of the caste order by these Avtaras, therefore, gave fresh sanction to this inequitable social system.

The Karma theory, as applied by Brahmanism, not only

explained the caste origin of individuals and provided for 'the co-existence of different ethical codes for different status groups,' but it also benumbed the moral sensitiveness of those who came under its spell. It made them blind to the vident immorality of the caste ethics. For, once the premises of this theory were accepted, 'Karma doctrine transformed the world into a strictly rational, ethically determined cosmos.'⁷³ The caste situation of the individual was not accidental. He was born into a caste as merited by his conduct in a prior life. 'An orthodox Hindu confronted with the deplorable situation of a member of an impure caste would only think that he has many a great sin to redeem from his prior existence.'⁷⁴ This also led to the corollary that a member of an impure caste thought primarily of bettering his future social opportunities in the next birth by leading an exemplary life according to the prescribed duties of the caste in which he was born. In this life there was no escape from the caste. There was no way to move up in the caste order. 'The inescapable on-rolling Karma causality is in harmony with the eternity of the world, of life, and, above all, the caste order.'⁷⁵ It was, therefore, senseless to think of overthrowing the system. An individual oppressed by the caste order was not left with any hope whatsoever. 'He too can "win the world", even the heavenly world; he can become a Kshatriya, a Brahman, he can gain Heaven and become a god — only not in this life, but in the life of the future after rebirth into the same world pattern.'⁷⁶ 'Absolute prerequisites, however, were strict fulfilment of caste obligations in this present life, the shunning of ritually sacrilegious yearning for renouncing caste.'⁷⁷ The Bhagavata Purana (Book XI, chapter X) demanded that the followers of Bhagavata, 'forsaking all desires should act in consonance with their caste'.

In such a scheme of Karma-bound society, men were 'for ever unequal'. 'Thus there was no "natural" order of men and things in contrast to positive social order. There was no sort of "natural law" ... All the problems which the concept of "natural law" called into being in the Occident were completely lacking. There simply was no "natural" equality of man before any authority, least of all before a super-worldly god... it excluded for ever the rise of social criticism of rationalistic speculation, and abstractions of natural law type, and

hindered the development of any sort of idea of “human rights”.⁷⁸

It is not suggested that the Karma theory was formulated necessarily to justify the caste order and caste-ethics. But, there is no doubt that it admirably served the ends of the caste order. Like the scriptures, religious literature and the epics, it was moulded to the extent necessary for the Brahmanical purposes.

2. The Brahmins

The Brahmins, as a caste, were the kingpin of the caste system in more than one way. They were its ideologues as well as the focal point around which the system revolved. As already pointed out, a great conscious effort was needed to dethrone Buddhism, to arrest the admixture of Aryan and non-Aryan blood, and to establish exclusive endogamy. These developments were the handiwork of Brahmins.

a) As Ideologues: Undoubtedly, the entire non-heretical post-Vedic literature is the handiwork of Brahmins. They are also mainly responsible for the moulding of non-heretical tradition. All thought the centuries, no one from within the orthodox society has ever dared to question this remoulding handiwork of the Brahmins. They saw to it that all criticism was throttled on pain of the critic being declared a heretic with its attendant consequences. It was, in fact, the arbitrary claim to the derivation of authority from the Vedas and the reconstruction of tradition which gave a semblance of continuity to the orthodox religion. It was through such means that the new gods of Neo-Brahmanism were related to the Vedic gods, new practices were tagged on to the old ones and the post-Vedic literature given full Vedic authority. And, precisely because these arbitrary claims and the reconstruction of tradition were not subject to any logical scrutiny, these came as a handy plastic material in the hands of the Brahmins to serve their own ends and to preserve the caste order.

The literature of the new form of Brahmanism is all the work of, or inspired by, the Brahman hierarchy.⁷⁹ The fifth book of Aitareya Aranyaka is notoriously spurious.⁸⁰ According to one view, even Vedic hymns have been arranged in the brahmanical interest,⁸¹ and Manu Smriti has been shortened and reactionary

new laws introduced in the old version.⁸² About the present Mahabharata there is no doubt that it is a redaction of Vyasa's original historical poem, edited by Vaishampayane and reissued a second time with notes and additions by Sauti.⁸³ It is inferred that the recasting was done to combat Buddhism, because 'adherence to Dharma and obedience to Brahmans is constantly insisted upon throughout the Mahabharata.'⁸⁴ Bhagavadgita, in its present form, is also supposed to be the work of different hands, because the contradictory postulates that it contains cannot otherwise be explained.⁸⁵ It is shown by internal evidence that this sacred book was, in the Brahmanical interests, interpolated with questionable passages. At one place Lord Krishna is said to preach that 'God distributes recompense without injustice and without partiality. He reckons the good as bad if people in doing good forget Him. He reckons and bad as good if people in doing bad remember Him and do not forget Him, whether these people be Vaiya or Sudra or Women...'⁸⁶ At another place, the same Divine Being is made to say that, 'If each members of these castes adheres to his customs and usages, he will obtain the happiness he wishes for, supposing that he is not negligent in the worship of God, not forgetting to remember Him in his most important avocations. But if anybody wants to quit the works and duties of his caste and adopt those of another caste, even if it would bring a certain honour to the latter, it is a sin, because it is a transgression of the rule.'⁸⁷ There is apparent contradiction in the concept of what is just and unjust in these two different stands. Obviously, the latter passage attempts to manipulate ethics in the interests of preserving the caste order.

Puranas too were changed. One undoubted proof of interpolations having taken place is that, although these belong to different periods, 'each and all of the Puranas have each and all of them the names of the whole eighteen recorded in the text.'⁸⁸

b) As a Pivotal Point : Almost all authorities are agreed that it is the Brahmin caste, which, like a wheel within a wheel, is the axis of the caste-system. It is this caste which sets the guidelines of the system, and determines of its course. It is the Brahmins who have profited most from the system and are mainly responsible for its maintenance and furtherance.

We have mentioned that the key to the caste system is the urge for gaining a position of vantage in the caste pyramid. Undoubtedly, the pivot of caste hierarchy is the recognized superiority of the Brahmin caste. Not only that; the Brahmins came to occupy the central position in Hinduism, because caste is essentially a social rank; and the social rank of the castes is determined with reference to the Brahmins.⁸⁹ The Brahmin 'reception or rejection of water or food is the measure of the status of any given caste in a given place'.⁹⁰ All things considered, what governs precedence is the degree of fidelity with which each caste conforms, or professes to conform, to Brahmanical teaching either as regards marriage or external purity, or as regards the occupations or accessory customs. A 'caste such as might arouse much prejudice and contempt may, in spite of all this, be treated with lasting esteem for the sole reason that it displays superior fidelity to the Brahmanic practices'.⁹¹

The religious and social authority that the Brahmins came to wield is too well known to need any comment. The recognition of the sanctity of the Brahmin Lavite caste became one of the very few binding factors in the chaotic mass of Neo-Brahmanical dogma and practice. The respect of some of the Hindus for the Brahmins goes so far that, according to a proverb, to be robbed by Sanavriya Brahmins, who had adopted highway robbery as a profession, was regarded as a favour from heaven.⁹²

In the political sphere, too, the Brahmins' influence came to be unchallenged. Even the Epic, which is connected with the nobility and hence tends to attribute to kings the supremacy which is claimed by the law books for the Brahmins, concedes the incomparable grandeur of the sacerdotal class. 'Whereas in other countries the rivalry between the nobility and the sacerdotal class generally resulted in the triumph of the temporal power over the spiritual, ... in India reverse has been the case. The caste system, with its water tight compartment, has been always adverse to the establishment of a regular political organization, while the great importance attached to religious rites and ceremonial observances has enabled the priestly class to aggrandize itself to an extent wholly unknown elsewhere. The supremacy of the Brahmins has now become one of the cardinal doctrines of Hinduism.'⁹³

Further evidence also point to the same end. The emphasis on religious rites and ceremonial observances came to occupy a pivotal position in the orthodox society. It was only the Brahmins who were the ministers; hence they alone profited from this ritualism and ceremonialism. The mechanism displayed for the assimilation of populations, gods, creeds, cults and practices, which were originally outside the pale of Brahmanism, clearly reveals that the main consideration governing this process was the caste interests of the Brahmins. No liberal social trend was every born or allowed to crop up in the orthodox sacerdotal circles.*

Thus, one can see the deliberate part played by the Brahmins in creating the caste ideology, in the interpolations of scriptures and literature, in the manipulation of tradition, in contriving to occupy the pivotal position in the religious and the social spheres, and in coming to have an edge over the temporal power.

3. The Institution

Ideologies, to be effective on the practical plane, have to develop corresponding institutions. These, once developed, have sometimes, apart from their ideological content, a compulsive mechanism and drive of their own. Of all the known major social formations, the caste is the most rigid in its constitution and inexorable in its operation.

Wilson sums up comprehensively the extent to which caste rulers govern every member of any caste. Caste, he says, 'gives its directions for recognition, acceptance, consecration, and sacramental dedication, and vice versa, of a human being on his appearance in the world. It has for infancy, pupilage, and manhood, its ordained methods of sucking, sipping, drinking, eating,

and voiding; of washing, rinsing, anointing, and smearing; of clothing, dressing and ornamenting; of sitting, rising and reclining; of moving, visiting, and travelling; of speaking, reading listening, and reciting; and of meditating, singing, working, playing, and fighting. It has its laws for social and religious rights, privileges, and occupations; for instructing, training, and educating; for obligation, duty, and practice; for divine recognition, duty and ceremony; for errors, sins, and transgressions; for intercommunion, avoidance, and excommunication; for defilement, ablution and purification; for fines, chastisements, imprisonments, mutilations, banishments and capital executions. It unfolds the ways of committing what it calls sin, accumulating sin, and of putting away sin; and of acquiring merit, dispensing merit, and losing merit. It treats of inheritance, conveyance, possession, and dispossession; and of acquiring bargains, gain, loan, and ruin. It deals with death, buria, and burning; and with commemoration, assistance and injury after death. It interferes, in short, with all the relations and events of life, and with what precedes and follows life...⁹⁴

Adherence to these rules or usages is normally ensured through the caste member of the locality who known each other intimately. The members, through the caste council (Panchayat) or otherwise, become the guardians of the caste rules. And the irony of it is that 'the lower the caste in the social scale, the stronger its combination and the more efficient its organization'.⁹⁵ In other words, the lower castes are more prone to tighten their own shackles.

The infringements of caste rules carried their own censures and penalties which were as varied as the caste rules. But, we shall take here only a case of excommunication from the caste so as to illustrate the inexorable working of the caste mechanism. O'Malley describes the retched plight of some high-caste persons who had been excommunicated in Orissa. No priest, barber or washerman would render them any service, with the result that 'they had long beards matted with dirt, their hair hung in long strands and was filthy in the extreme, and their clothes were beyond description for uncleanness'.⁹⁶ Similarly, Abbe Dubios draws an even more graphic picture of the fate of an excommunicated man. 'This expulsion from the caste, which

occurs in cases of breach of customary usage or of some public offence which would dishonour the whole caste if it remained unpunished, is a kind of civil excommunication which deprives the person who has the misfortune to incur it of all intercourse with his fellows. It renders him, so to speak, dead to the world. With the loss of caste, he loses not only his relations and friends, but sometimes even his wife and children, who prefer to abandon him entirely rather than share his ill-fortune. No one dare eat with him nor even offer him a drop of water.

‘He must expect wherever he is recognized, to be avoided, pointed at with the finger of scorn, and looked upon as a reprobate... A mere Sudra, provided he has some trace of honour and scrupulousness, would never join company nor even communicate with a Brahman thus degraded.’⁹⁷

4. Gordianknot

The pre-eminence given to caste status catered to the common human failing of status consciousness. The spiritual sanction behind the caste ideology made it sink deep into the convictions of the population. The rigidity of the caste rules and their wide range tightened their grip over the individual and the community. The caste panchayats ensured a relentless working of the caste mechanism. All these, in combination, came to constitute one inexorable complex. All its constituents being inter-connected, they fused to form one organic whole. Each of the components of the caste complex had developed an independent propelling force of its own. These forces reinforced one another, and, acting together in the same direction, they formed one formidable resultant power. If one, or a few of these component forces were weakened or eliminated, the forward thrust still continued to possess a might momentum.

The caste system served the interests of the Brahmin caste, and the Brahmins strained themselves to uphold the system. They used the authority of the scriptures, tradition, custom, ceremonialism, ritualism, the Avtara theory, the concepts of Dharma and pollution, and the like, so as to serve their interests and to consolidate the caste structure of society. In fact, the caste structure of society, the caste interests of the Brahmins and the caste ideology blended into one another in such a manner

that it became different to demarcate as to where the one began and the other ended. Altogether these formed a powerful complex, a big Gordiaknot, of social reaction that had to be tackled and cut by any liberal force aiming at social progress.

CHAPTER V

The Fate Of Liberal Trends

The orthodox caste order, being constitutionally anti-humanistic, did not allow liberal social trends born of heterodox circles to flourish.

The first notable break from the tradition are the Upanisadic precepts. The Upanisads owe their origin either to the Kashatriyas or hermits who were not connected with the priestly class.¹ In any case, these precepts were meant, or expect to be practised, only by a few eligible ones or the recluse in the seclusion of the forest.² Thus, this Upanisadic liberalism was confined to an extremely limited circle which was normally cut off from society. There is no indication that it was ever a popular social or religious movement by any standards. As such, it was not of much social consequence. All the same, it was a liberal social trend in so far as it marked an ideological break from the Vedic religion of sacrifice and rituals.³

But, even this liberal Upanisadic trend, circumscribed as it was from the social point view, did not remain unalloyed for long. The Upanisads were incorporated in the traditional scholastic literature of the Brahmins, but only after these had been hedged around with the very ideology these had sought to controvert. The Upanisadic divininations regarding the deeper realities of the soul and the world were inextricably mixed up with the Mantras and formulae of the Brahmanas, which upheld, or laid down rules, for the performance of sacrifices and ceremonies. 'Austerities, self control, and rituals are the foundation of the true knowledge contained in the Upanisads; the Vedas are the links, truth is the body.'⁴ 'All this is true, the rituals which were revealed to the sages and which were connected

with the Vedic Mantras'.⁵ 'You should not neglect to perform the rites in the honour of the gods and the ancestors.'⁶

These are not just isolated passages in this strain; there are so many.⁷ In fact, In some of the prose Upanisads, whole chapters are there which have very little that is Upanisadic in them. They are Brahmanas, pure and simple; they describe ceremonies to be performed, state and explain the Mantras to be used therein and do little else besides.'⁸ Also, there are some later Upanisads which are too palpably ritualistic (e.g. the Rudraksa-Jebala Upanisad).⁹ These, no doubt are not given the same place of honour as the earlier Upanisads, but they do indicate the extent to which the attempt to engulf genuine Upanisadic thought with the old ritualistic tradition had proceeded.

There are only two explanations possible. Either the Upanisads in their inception were as much ritualistic and protagonistic of the Brahmanical tenets as the other Vedic literature; or the Brahmins took care to make the necessary interpolations and alternations before they allowed the Upanisads to pass on to posterity as religious literature.

The second liberal trend to appear, in point of time, was the great Buddhist movement. Sykes has adduced cogent evidence to prove that 'the Buddhism taught by Sakya Muni prevailed generally in India as the predominant religion, from the Himalayas to Ceylon, and from Orissa to Gujarat, from the 6th century B.C., certainly to the 7th century A.D. ¹⁰ In the political sphere, too, Fa hien found that 'from the time of leaving the deserts and the river (Jumna) to the West, or rather having passed to the East-ward of the deserts and the Jumna, all the kings of the different kingdoms in India are firmly attached to the Law of Buddha...'¹¹ But of these Buddhists, who had been predominant for about one thousands years, 'only in Orissa, does a community (of around 2,000 persons) remain. Other Buddhists enumerated elsewhere in India are immigrants'.¹² Thus Buddhism was not the victim of metamorphosis; it was a downright causality.

The genesis of Bhagavatism is shrouded in obscurity,¹³ but most of the authorities are agreed that these religions or cults

were in their inception alien to old Brahmanism.¹⁴ Barth goes so far as to see a qualitative difference between, on the one hand, the monotheism of both Vaisnavism and Saivism, centring as these do around highly concrete and intensely personal (even anthropomorphized) gods, and on the other, the abstract pantheism of lord Brahmanism.¹⁵ Lord Krishna, the reputed founder of Bhavatism, a religion independent of Vedic tradition,¹⁶ and the author of Bhagavadgita, was born among the Satpata sept of the outland Yadavas, a name connected at a later period of history with a powerful Rajput tribe. 'The most ancient section of the sectarian literature, which in its existing form is certainly the work of the Brahmans, did not always belong to them. The Mahabharata and several Puranas are put in the mouth of the profane bards... The Kural of Tiruvalluvar... is the work of a Pareiya. There are legends which represent Valmiki, the author of the Ramayana, as a Koli, that is to say, a member of one of the most despised aboriginal tribes on the Bombay coast. Vyasa, the greatest name connected with the epic and sectarian poetry, the mythical author of the Mahabharata and the Puranas, must have been... a Brahman of extremely questionable purity, and similar traditions are in circulation respecting the celebrated Sankara... If we compare them with the doctrine of a large fraternity professed in the main by the majority of these religions... We shall at once see that we are on ground obviously different from that of the old Brahmanism, and that a certain unmistakable popular element is a characteristic feature of these religions. A investigation into the character of their theology will conduct us to the same conclusion.'¹⁷ Above all, Sankaracharya, at a time when the Bhagavatas had long since been immersed into Brahmanism, refers to the anti-Vedic character of the sect.^{17a}

There is in these sects even an occasional claim to superiority over the Vedic tradition. In the Mahabharata (i. 269) it is stated that when the gods put into the balance on the one scale the four Vedas, and, on the other, Mahabharata alone, the latter outweighed the former. The Agni Purana (I,8-11) declares that it is the revelation of the supreme Brahma, of which of the Veda is only the inferior expression. The Bhagavadgita (ii. 42-45) does not adopt a different style of speaking.¹⁸ It is not unlikely that the cult of Siva was current among the non-

Aryans in the pre-Vedic period.¹⁹ At least, Lord Siva's cult was by and by celebrated without Brahmins.^{19a} and his detractors reproach him with being the god of Sudras and people of no account.²⁰ One of the later offshoots of Saivism, the Lingayats, became so unorthodox that it culminated in an almost open breach with Hinduism. The system of Basawa 'was revolutionary all along the line in doctrine, ritual and social customs. So much so, that inspite of all the attempts of the Lingayats to tone down its daring originality they have not succeeded in completely obliterating its individuality or in assimilating it to orthodox Hinduism.'²¹

The religious texts of the Bhagavatas were interpolated so as to link them up with and to show them as derived from the Vedas. The theory of Avtaras, with which Vedic texts were not familiar, was put forward to facilitate the identification of the deities of the popular creeds with those of the old Vedic ones and thus help in the assimilation of Bhagvatism and other religions into Brahmanism.²² New rituals, entirely foreign to Vedism, and even of non-Brahmanical origin, such as temple, image and phallus worship, were borrowed and interwoven into the Saiva and Vaisnava cults. The Pujari Brahmins became the ministers. The adorable, Lord Siva, was stated to be the upholder of the race of Manu²³, and Lord Kishna was credited with being the formulator of Chaturvarnya.²⁴ Thus the bhagavat (Vaisnava) religion in the end became a part and parcel, rather the most important feature, of Neo-Brahmanism. It got so much involved in the rigidity of caste, tradition, custom and ritualism that, when Ramananda broke away from the system of Ramanuja (substantially on the point of a liberal interpretation of old Hindu social rules and particularly on the transgression of dietary restrictions), it was considered such a revolutionary step by him that he called himself and his followers 'the liberated ones'.²⁵

The caste ideology casts its shadow even beyond its borders. Muslims in India were declared Malechas. They were considered so much outsider the pale of Hindu society that Hindu once converted to Islam could on no account be taken back in the parent fold even though converted forcibly. Yet we find Indian Muslims and Christians taking to customs and practices

which their faith do not permit. 'Muslim castes are a familiar phenomenon'.²⁶ 'The Muhammadans themselves recognize two main social divisions: Ashraf, or noble, including all undoubted descendants of foreigners and converts from the higher Hindu castes, and Ajlaf, or common people... Intermarriage between Ashraf and Ajlaf is reprobated and it is seldom that a man of the higher class will give his daughter to one of the lower.'^{27a} 'To sum up, it may be said that, though caste is unknown to Muhammadan religion, it exists in full force among many of the Muhammadans of upper India, and in all parts of the country amongst the functional groups that form the lower strata of the community'.^{27b} 'Bougle mentions a church in Tamilnadu with separate naves going on to a common chancel to accommodate hostile caste.'²⁸ Writing of the Syrian Christians of the Malabar Coast, Lyer says: 'The average Indian Christian is a staunch observer of caste... There are a large number of Christians in the Southern Districts of the Madras Presidency who even boast of their being firmer and truer adherents of the caste system than the Hindus.'²⁹

This consistent and determined attempt to mould, twist or absorb all liberal religious and social trends could not be accidental. A great conscious effort was needed to achieve this result.

Human and Ethical Values

All those liberal social trends and ethical values which were incompatible with the inhuman code of the caste system were doomed to failure. Every social order is based on certain values. The very life-blood of the caste order was social inequality. It hindered the development of any sort of idea of 'Human Rights'.

More than that, some sections of the population were regarded as almost bestial rather than human. The whole Sudra race was equated with a burial ground. Aitareya Brahmana describes the Sudra as 'Yatha-Kama-Vadhya' (fit to be beaten with impunity) and 'Dvijatisusrusha' or menial service was his prescribed lot.³⁰ One text puts the murder of a Sudra on the same level as the destruction of a crow, an owl or a dog.³¹ A sudra could be killed at will.³² The excessive contempt, humailiation and degradation

of the Sudra reached its climax in the permanent institutions of untouchability and unapproachability. The Jataka stories confirm that the treatment meted out to Chandalas in actual practice was not much different from that prescribed in the Shastric texts.³³

Every social order, in order to survive, must preserve the social values on which it is based. The protagonists of the orthodox social order were very clear in their minds about this objective. It is very significant that, out of the huge mass of orthodox literature, there is hardly a passage which unequivocally concedes social equality between man and man, Half a dozen or so passages and instances are cited to show that some sort of equality was conceded. But these isolated passages and instances have to be assessed in the context of the actual orthodox religious and social development as a whole. Firstly, these passages appear to signify religious equality rather than distinct social equality. Hinduism is noted for its religious catholicity, but only so long as anything did not challenge its social order. Secondly, the Sudras were, at a very early period of time, pointedly excluded from being given even religious equality. Women came to be explicitly debarred later. There is no evidence that before the medieval Bhakti movement, it was ever mooted or an attempt was made basically to reverse these development. Thirdly, these passages are mostly from the Upanisads and the Mahabharata, which in their inception belonged to the unorthodox schools of thought, or from the utterance of some ascetic or mendicant, who had cut himself from society, i.e. the caste order. Fourthly, for one dubious passage expressing the liberal idea appears more like a residue left over, by mistake or otherwise, from a liberal ideology, rather than a real expression of the text itself. If the Mahabharata concedes that all castes may offer sacrifices to Prajapatya, and that the sacrifice of faith is instituted for them all (xii, ver. 2313), in the same chapter it is declared that, 'Prajapati created him (the Sudra), as the slave of the other castes' (xii ver. 2377). He is not to amass wealth, for by its acquisition he, who is an inferior, would subject his superiors to himself.³⁴ He may not offer the sacrifices open to other castes, but

must confine himself to the simple domestic offerings, pakayajna.³⁵

According to Rhys-Devids, the Brahmins in the pre-Buddhist period did not even pose as authorities on Dhamma used in the sense of moral conduct or code, as distinguished from all questions either of ritual or theology.³⁶ Garbe has expressed the view that on moral side 'there is dreadfully too little in the Brahmanical religion and philosophy.'³⁷ "Keith 'too who has made an exhaustive study of the Brahmanical scriptures, comes to the dismal conclusion that there is not much of the ethical in them.'³⁸ The authors of Vedic India are also disgusted with the ethics of the Brahmanas. 'It is very vharacteristic of the Brahmana authors that sin is generally regarded by them as a physical defilement.'³⁹ Max Weber, too, is of the opinion that the Vedas 'do not contain a rational ethics'. The theory that Brahmanas are above all social and moral law sapped the foundation of morality.⁴⁰⁻⁴¹ As against this, the religion of Lord Krishna, in its unalloyed form, laid special stress on the ethical requirements. Even Manu's Dharma Sastra says: 'Only a man's virtue accompanies his soul... The essence of conduct is the motive which prompts it... Truthfulness, devotion and purity of thought, word and deed, transcend all ceremonial cleaning or washing of water... Vice is worse than death... A true believer can extract good out of evil... By forgiveness of injuries the learned (in the scriptures) are purified.'⁴²

These apparent contradictions were not incidental but were a significant feature of the earlier socio-religious literature. From the very early times, there has been a current of spiritual and moral longing in the Indian tradition. In the form of the Buddhist movement, it even overflowed the boundaries of India. The country had many orders of Sadhus and mendicants. Rishis and ascetics used to retire to the jungle for meditation and contemplation. But, they were not concerned with the affairs of the world, much less with the ethical issues of class or caste. This way of the recluse was open to all, even to Sudras and women. To this class, 'the most perfect freedom, both of thought and expression, was permitted'.⁴³ Many of these mendicants had no special philosophy of their own. They were primarily interested in Acara (personal conduct),⁴⁴ and lived 'in pursuit of what they thought to be truth'.⁴⁵

All the same, social inequality was the very basis of the caste order of society. Either the caste order had to change, or the moral system had to accept and adopt the caste values. As the preservation of the caste society remained the supreme consideration, 'There was no universally valid ethic, but only a strict status compartmentalization of private and social ethic, disregarding the few absolute and general ritualistic prohibitions (particularly the killing of cows).... The doctrine of Karma deduced from the principle of compensation for previous deeds of the world, not only explained the caste organisation but the rank of divine, human, and animal beings of all degrees. Hence it provided for the co-existence of different ethical codes for different status groups which not only differed widely but were often in sharp conflict. This presented no problem. In principle there could be a vocational dharma for prostitutes, robbers, and thieves as well as for Brahmins and kings. In fact, quite sincere attempts at drawing these extreme conclusion appeared. The struggle of man and man in all its forms was as little a problem as his struggle with animals and the gods, as was the existence of the positively ugly, stupid, and (from the stand-point of the dharma of a Brahman or other twice-born) positively objectionable.'⁴⁶

The 'compartmentalization of ethics' is just another name for ethics of the caste order. The Brahmins used the Karma doctrine as the key to justify the caste ethics. It made the people blind to the immorality involved in the dichotomy of Indian ethics. The doctrine of Ahimsa had seeped down to the level of the masses; and, yet, there was complete lack of reaction to the lot of the Sudras and the untouchables, which was considered to be the result of their own sins and doings. In any case, it is clear that the motive of preserving the caste order and its values overweighed all other considerations. Regarding the incident of Lord Rama cutting off the head of a Sudra, Senart comments: 'Insolence such as this threatens to upset the whole equilibrium of public order, so essential is the maintenance of the prerogatives which belong exclusively to the various castes.'⁴⁷

The concepts of justice and sin were likewise distorted. Rather than being a dispenser of impartial justice, it was Brahman who 'enacted the code of laws and taught it to him (Manu)'. Thus, in order to invest the code of Manu, which laid the legal and

ideological basis of the caste order and reduced the very concept of justice to a mockery, with divine authority, there was no hesitation even in corrupting the image of God-head, the religious sources of justice. Instead of being the Universal Father, God himself was made the author of unequal castes.⁴⁸ 'Prajapati created him (the Sudras) as the slave of other castes.'⁴⁹ The motivation underlying this criterion of justice was not concealed. 'And thus he encloses those two castes (Vaisya and Sudra) on both sides by the priesthood and nobility, and makes them submissive.'⁵⁰ It is unnecessary to go into the details as to how the Manva Dharma Shastra and certain other Dharma Shastras, which in certain respects were more narrow than even Manu's code,⁵¹ made the position of Sudras 'bestial rather than human'. These downgraded the Vaisyas and women, and, utterly disregarding all canons of justice, loaded the penal code against the Sudras and in favour of the Brahmins.⁵²

The Brahmanical view of sin was extended to cover a very wide field of omission and commissions. Even petty breaches of trivial rules of hygiene and etiquette came to be regarded as sinful. But what is relevant to our purpose is how the Brahmanical view of sin was used to consolidate the caste order. "But if anybody wants to quit the works and duties of his caste and adopt those of another caste, even if it would bring a certain honour to the latter, it is a sin, because it is a transgression of the rule."⁵³ If by any means a Sudra acquired the knowledge of the Veda, and started to teach it to others, his pupil became involved in deadly sin.⁵⁴ The most heinous crime was to commit an offence against the caste order,^{54a} and, the soul of one who neglected his caste-duties might pass into a demon.⁵⁵

That the Brahmanical view of sin had not much to do with religious or ethics, becomes clear when the means employed to expiate sin are considered. 'The panchagava, for example, is sufficient to obtain the remission of any sin whatever, even when the sin has been committed deliberately ... Looking as they do upon sin as material or bodily defilement, it is not surprising that they consider mere oblations of the body sufficient to wipe it out ... A Brahman, who happened to go three times round a temple of Siva merely in pursuit of a dog that he was beating to death, obtained the remission of all his sins... All this is

vouched for in the sacred Hindu books.⁵⁶ Commenting on the easy expiation of sins thus obtained, Albracht Weber says, 'It is certainly astonishing how, with a general forgiveness of sins easily earned, a moral life can still exist among the Hindus.'⁵⁷

Perhaps the most effective contrivance utilized by the Brahmins for moulding religious and moral values in order to sanctify the caste order was the connotation they attached to the concept of Dharma. This ideal, even in its purity, extended so much from religious and ethics to one's ritual duties and caste conduct that its concept provided considerable elbow room for Brahmanical manoeuvre and manipulation. In the hands of the Brahmins, Dharma came to mean primarily ritualistic duties, which in its turn became closely interwoven in the texture of the caste-order. A line of distinction was drawn between Dharma on the one hand and Mata (religious doctrine) and Marga (holy end) on the other. While Mata and Marga are freely elected, dharma is eternal i.e. unconditionally valid.⁵⁸ In other words, a good deal of latitude was allowed in the choice of Mata and Marga, but one's Dharm depended upon the caste into which the individual was born. It was indissolubly connected with his ritualistic duties. Hence, for the duties of one's caste, a special term, 'Varnasrama Dharma' was coined. As such, it became the central criterion of Hinduism. By ignoring his ritualistic duties, namely, the caste duties, the individual lost both his Dharma and his caste.⁵⁹ Significantly, the codes, which laid the basis of caste society were titled as Dharm Shastras. These were given more weight than the Darsanas, although it was universally admitted in the twelfth century that a Darsana must be based on a Sutra.⁶⁰

Recapitulation

Let us here briefly recapitulate the salient features of the social development that our discussion has so far led us to.

1. In India alone, social evolution resulted in the formation, not of classes, but of a well-defined system of castes enveloping the entire society. This shows that there was some strong and exceptional driving force behind the Indian social development which was not to be met elsewhere.
2. This exceptional force was the caste ideology or Brahmanism,

- governed mainly by the interests of the two upper castes only.
3. This ideology had, or had been given, the complete support not only of the scriptures and allied literature but also of all system, organs and institutions of the orthodox religion.
 4. This caste ideology had set social aims which were extremely reactionary and from which it never deviated. It consistently worked towards social reaction and, despite a set-back for about a thousand years when Buddhism was supreme, it reasserted itself in the form of Neo-Brahmanism.
 5. This retrograde caste system also became the grave-yard of all liberal social trends and movements which came within its grasp.
 6. This ideology thwarted and throttled the growth of any just social ethics, much less a humanistic one.
 7. The caste ideology and the caste system were indissolubly linked with each other. In fact, they were the two sides of the same coin. The two together constituted a single solid block, insurmountable and insoluble by any social reform from within the social system. Even after centuries of liberal influences of the Western culture and civilization, it has not been found possible to resolve it substantially. The caste system has been the quintessence of social exclusiveness and social inequality.

The constitution and the consistent history of this social system, spread over millennia, inevitably leads to a clear conclusion: namely, that no radical social change, much less a social revolution such as the Sikh movement aimed at, could be envisaged, atleast near about the time of the rise of the Sikh movement, by remaining within the framework of the caste society or by accepting its ideology. For the purpose of our discussion of the subject that follows, this lesson is extremely relevant and important. For, the more close a liberal social trend was to the caste ideology, the more readily it was twisted or absorbed. This ideology cast its shadows even outside its borders and later affected, to an extent, even the Indian Muslims and Christians. Therefore, for a revolutionary social change, complete break with the caste society and its ideology was essential.

CHAPTER VI

The Caste Society, Islam And The Mohammadan Rule

The advent of Islam and Mohammadan rule in India opened an altogether new era in the history of land. These led to wide ranging political, religious and social repercussions. But, we shall be considering only those influences that have a direct bearing on our subject. Evidently, the most outstanding consequence of the Muslim impact was the polarization of the mass of the people into two permanently hostile camps.

Some writers are of the view that had the penetration of Islam in India been achieved in a peaceful manner, it would not have embittered the relations between the Hindus and the Muslims. They base their view on the fact that, between the 7th and the 10th centuries, some isolated pockets of Muslim settlements were established and tolerated in the southern peninsula, and there were even instances of a few Hindu kings having embraced Islam.

There is little doubt that the loot and massacres of Hindus and the destruction of their temples and idols at the hands of the Muslim invaders from the North did dramatize and drive deep the impact of Mohammadan oppression on Hindu consciousness. But, one must differentiate between causes which are basic, whose effect is lasting, and those whose effect, though apparently spectacular, is nevertheless temporary. As Prof. Habib has pointed out, the Mongols (during 1228-1260) killed at least eight million Muslims in cold blood; yet no Muslim bears them ill-will. Almost all the Mongols in Muslim lands had been converted to Islam by the year 1300 A.D. ¹ Similarly, Mehar Gul's incursion into the northern part of the country was no less than a

cataclysm. Not only no trace of any bitterness towards his race remains, but those of his hordes, which remained behind in the country, were absorbed and given an honourable place in its society. The causes of the permanent estrangement between the Hindus and the Muslims are, therefore, different and lie deep.

1. Clash of Social Values

Islam was the greatest revolution of its times. The basis of Islamic polity was social justice and religious equality, while the avowed principle of the Brahmanical caste organization was social inequality. There were deviations and lapses in the practice of the principle of social equality by the Muslims, but Islamic society had marched towards this objective over a period and on a scale which no other religious society had done. A king and a beggar could stand shoulder to shoulder to Friday prayers, and Islam permitted a slave to become a king which the caste ideology did not.

When two social systems, and the values on which these are based, are irreconcilable, there is not much scope for mutual adjustment and compromise. 'Among the Hindus, institutions of this kind (i.e. meaning castes) abound. We Muslims of course, stand on the other side of the question, considering all men equal, except in piety; and this is the greatest obstacle which prevents any approach or understanding between Hindus and Muslims.² What happened to the Buddhists, who had different social values and were by no means violent, has already been seen. The early Muslim settlements in the southern peninsula were tolerated because these were too insignificant to pose a challenge to the established social order. Nor is the cultural or social assimilation of these Muslims nearer today than it was a thousands years earlier.

2. Clash of Religious Loyalties

Divergent religious loyalties, especially when surcharged with emotions, are a very great hurdle in harmonizing different religious groups. The fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man are the basic tenets of both Islamic and Christian creeds, and their theological divergences are not of a fundamental nature. Islam even recognizes Christ as one of its own previous prophets.

But, the exclusive allegiance to Prophet Muhammad and the Koran, which Islam, as understood or practised by its followers, demands as a primary obligation, has kept the Christians and the Muslims apart as hostile camps in parts of Europe and the Middle East. This point is further emphasized by the life and death struggle in which the Christian and Muslim communities, who belong to the same racial stock, are locked at present in Lebanon. Unswerving allegiance to the Vedas and the allied scriptures was a basic tenet of orthodox Hinduism, and any deviation from this was regarded as a heresy. This was the plank on which it had combated Buddhism were far more cardinal than those between Islam and Christianity. As such, the hostility between the Hindus and the Muslims was based on comparatively strong grounds. Because, in addition to the diverse religious loyalties, the deep differences between their theological concepts, and social and cultural values, were complimentary forces all united in accentuating the discord.

3. Mass Polarization

The Indo-Aryans started with a feeling of their own racial superiority, pride in the fair colour of their skins, and with an undisguised contempt for the dark-skinned natives of the country. Their conflict with the latter must have sharpened this racial consciousness, and their ultimate triumph must have added greatly to their racial pride. Whatever its other demerits, this racial consciousness and pride must have raised the level of the group consciousness of the Indo-Aryans, in some degree at least, above that of the family, clan and tribal loyalties. But, the antagonism between the Indo-Aryans and the non-Aryans, gradually died down with the fusion of the two races on a mass scale, and with the establishment of political and social hegemony of the former, which the latter accepted without even questioning its validity. Only a small coterie of the upper castes continued to harp occasionally on the purity of their blood. Not that it had a basis in reality any longer; nor was it an expression of racial antagonism. It was now more an assertion of their right to social distinction.

On the Aryam racial pride was superimposed the overweening

pride in the achievements of the Indo-Aryan culture. Alberuni noted that 'the Hindus believe that there is no country but theirs, no nation like theirs, no kings like theirs, no religions like theirs, no science like theirs'.³ 'Their caste system, they believed, had originated from the body of Brahma himself and some of their scriptures were revealed texts. They were enabled to maintain undisturbed this self-esteem of theirs by their isolation from other people.'⁴

Pride in the Aryan culture came to be shared also by the pre-Aryan population; partly because it retained some important elements of their own previous culture, and partly because they, perhaps, never had a group-consciousness of their cultural distinctiveness. There are records of the armed resistance they put up against the Aryans, but there is not much evidence of their having offered any resistance to their absorption in the Aryan culture, though they were, as shown by the presence of their forts, at a higher level of civilization than the Aryan pastorals. Similarly, the Huns, the Sakas and the other nomads, who later overran parts of the country and who were at a comparatively low level of culture, presented no problem to being assimilated in the social and cultural system of the land. Thus, the Aryan culture, though the Aryan in name only, became the one common factor in giving some sort of a vague feeling of oneness to the otherwise heterogeneous mixture of races, castes, tribes, cults and beliefs. How deep and widespread this sentiment was it is difficult to judge. It could, probably, not have been very deep with those sections of the population which were not fairly treated by the social system. Nor could it be very widespread, because the Brahmins had been at pains to exclude as large a section of the people as possible from any real contact with scriptural source of their culture. This is evidenced by the later large scale voluntary defections to Islam. Any way, if there was at all any sentiment, above sectional interests and loyalties, shared by the people at large, it was pride in the Aryan culture.

Besides other contributory factors in the continuous synthesis of the Neo-Aryan culture and its ever-changing pattern, one element, which is fairly constant, is an extraordinary reverence for an allegiance to the past. This sentiment was perhaps an out come of the sweet

memories of their homeland, from which they had migrated to India, and which the Aryans might have retained and cherished. Whatever its genesis, the mere fact of belonging to the past came to be regarded as conferring special value. The older a thing was, the more sacrosanct it was likely to be; and the older a tradition or a custom, the more inviolable it became. The Vedas were sacred, because, apart from being regarded as the revealed texts, these were supposed to have originated in the unfathomable past. The Aryan history came to be computed in astronomical figures, in Yugas.

The gravamen of the charge against the heterodox schools was that these flouted the authority of the Vedic tradition. The struggle for supremacy between the orthodox and the heterodox schools, especially that against Buddhism, was carried also on the plane of discussions and debates. That these discussions were carried on a fairly large scale is attested to by the historical evidence of the Chinese travelers and the Buddhism records. These discussions and debates, therefore, helped in the polarisation of ideas around this sentiment; and the ultimate victory of the orthodox, school, the traditionalists, considerably strengthened it. In the later periods, it became almost a craze to trace fictitiously the origin of ideas, writings, sects, traditions, customs and even dynasties and castes, to a hoary past. What is suprising is that even the Buddhists, who started by challenging the authority of the Vedas and that of the old tradition, later themselves fell victims to this tendency. They also invented fictitious derivations from the past to invest sanctity to their beliefs, customs and religious personalities.

Toynbee has advanced sufficiently weighty evidence to support the view that to hang on to the past of the surest signs of the decadence of a civilization and a culture. Of course, pride in one's cultural past is legitimate in so far it helps the cohesion of a people who own it. The Brahmins took care to cultivate this sentimental attachment to the past, because it was in their caste interests to do so. The Vedas contain hymns which assign a pre-eminent religious and social position to the Brahmins. The old tradition, custom, religious ritual and practices contributed to the same end. The later scriptures, which institutionalized the privileged position of the Brahmin caste, all

claimed to derive their authority from the Vedas, old tradition and customs. There was presumed to be nothing older than these. To sanctify the past was, therefore, to establish the sanctity of the Vedas, old tradition and custom, which in turn established the authority of the Brahmins. This was Orthodoxy. Any deviation or innovation which challenged this basic stand was unorthodox and heretical. Deviations there were and those were accepted, but only the ones which did not challenge this basis of Orthodoxy. That is why allegiance to the Vedas and the Vedic tradition, however nominal, was a prerequisite for Orthodoxy and entry into its fold. The old culture itself was creation of the Brahmin caste and was designed to serve the Brahmanical system of castes. In this manner, the sentimental attachment to the past became bound down hand and foot to social reaction.

However, all this pride in the achievements of the Aryan culture, or in the traditional past, was not enough to cement the Hindus into a cohesive nation. In the first place, pride in the achievements of the Aryan race or its culture was quite faint and remained mainly confined to the elite of the upper castes. But, more important than this limitation was the constitutionally divisive character of the caste system. Mutual repulsion between its constituents was inherent in the system. The caste system was the antithesis of social unity, much more of national unity. Before the armies professing Islam invaded the country, its people lacked even a common denominator. It is the foreigner who called them Hindus, a not very respectable term in its original meaning. The conflict with these invaders was not only a clash of arms but also a clash of religious and social values. It was also a clash of pride in the respective cultures and the traditions of the two parties. Indian orthodoxy was for the first time face to face with an invader whom it could neither defeat militarily, nor absorb into its religion, culture, and social structure.

It is true that the Muslim rulers did not represent the real spirit of Islam. The followers of a prophet rarely sustain his spirit for a long time. This has happened time and again, not only in the case of Islam, but in the case of the followers of other religions as well. People interpret the message of the prophets according to their own lights and limitations. In

doing so, they are often influenced by their secular interests. But, there is no denying the fact that the rigid interpretation of the Shariat, and adherence to a narrow interpretation of it, had become a dominant feature of the Islamic world. Muslims, by and large acted accordingly.

Balbal's instructions to his son included: "Mahmud ! I have given you instructions according to the requirements of the time. But, if I give you instructions of religious-minded kings and say that you should use all your courage and valour in the destruction of infidelity and shirk, to keep the infields and idol worshippers degraded and dishonoured so that you may get a place in the company of prophets and to crush and uproot the Brahmins so that infidelity vanishes."⁵

Ittumush appointed Sayyid Nur-ud-din-Mubarak Ghaznavi as his Shaik-ul-Islam. In that capacity the Sayyid exhorted the Sultan to institute an inquisition in India. 'Kings will not be able to discharge their duty of protecting the Faith unless they overthrow and uproot Kufir and Kufiri (infidelity), shirk (setting partners to God) and the worship of idols, all for the sake of God and inspired by a sense of honour for protecting the din (faith) of the Prophet of God. But if total extirpation of idolatry is not possible owing to the firms roots of kufri and the large number of kufirs and mushriks, the king should atleast strive to disgrace, dishonour and defame the mushrik and idol worshipping Hindus, who are the worst enemies of God and His Prophet.'⁶

These are not just isolated instances which may be dismissed as the views of a few bigots, This was believed to be the standard for the Islamic practice of Shariat (Islamic law) by an overwhelming majority of the Muslim ruling classes and the Muslim masses. If there were deviations from this practice, these were as concessions due to the exigencies of the political situation. Mahmud Ghaznavi spurned the tempting offer of gold and jewels by the priests of the Somnath temple to save their idol. He preferred that the verdict of history should be that he was an idol-breakers rather than an idol-sparer for the sake of wealth. His raids in India were for loot and plunder, but in this instance he spurned that temptation and stood by what he believed to be his religious duty. After Akbar's experiments in religious toleration, Muslim bigotry could stage an easy come-back under Augrangzeb

(when political sagacity should have encouraged the continuance of Akbar's policy) only because it had deep roots in the Muslim tradition and convictions.

This anti-Kafir detestation was matched by an equally venomous anti-Malecha hatred shared by the Hindus. Alberuni's was a fair representation of this hatred when he wrote that 'all their (Hindus) fanaticism is directed against those who do not belong to them, i.e. against all foreigners. They call them Malecha (impure) and forbid having any connection with them, by it by inter-marriage or any other kind of relationship, or by sitting together eating and drinking with them, because thereby, they think, they would be polluted. They consider as impure anything which touches the fire and water of a foreigner, and no household can exist without these two elements. Besides, they never desire that a thing which once has been polluted should be purified and thus recovered, as under ordinary circumstances, if anybody or anything had become unclean, one would strive to regain the state of purity. They are not allowed to receive any body who does not belong to them, even if he wished it or was inclined to their religion. This too renders any connection with them quite impossible and constitutes the widest gulf between us and them.

'In the third place, in all manners and usages they differ from us to such a degree as to frighten their children with us, with our dress, and our ways and customs, and as to declare us to be devil's breed, and as our doings as the very opposite of all this is good and proper.'⁷

The Brahmanical society was never friendly towards people outside the orbit of its own culture. They were all Malechas. Before the advent of the Muslims, however, the Malechas were, by and large, either subjugated or assimilated in the caste system. Moreover, the incursions of Greeks and Huns had a limited impact both as regards time and geography of the country. The term Malecha itself had become more a memory of the past, as there had been left no formidable focus as its target. It is doubtful whether this anti-Malecha feeling was ever shared by the population at large who were themselves second-rate citizens. This anti-Malecha hostility was, probably, confined to the elite circles who were conscious of preserving their system intact.

The Muslims, however, spread over the whole of the country, and came to stay permanently as a separate religious and cultural identity. As already seen, the cleavage between the Hindus and the Muslims was irreconcilable, because it was based on basic religious, cultural and social differences. This anti-Malecha hatred became revived with a redoubled force. It served as a cohesive force to unite people who were opposed to the Muslims, for a common hatred shared by a people binds them. Bismark engineered conflict with France to make the Germans a nation.

This is how, it appears, the foundation of Hindu group-consciousness or what may be for convenience called nationalism, came to be laid. In its genesis and in its content. It was, for all practical purposes, essentially anti-Muslim. This group-consciousness became almost synonymous with the word Muslim. This group consciousness became more broad-based and deeper than the hitherto vague and feeble feelings of ones, which the pride in the Aryan culture had earlier provided. The way the Muslim invaders massacred innocent Hindus and desecrated all that they held sacred — their temples, idols, etc., — made this consciousness very widespread. For, people on a mass scale, who were attached sentimentally to these, came to hate the invaders. The anti-Muslim feeling, the obverse side of Hindu group-consciousness, sank deeper in their minds because the Hindus could not match the Muslims in the battle-field and pay them back in their own coin. They could simply brood on the wrongs suffered by them and nurse this hostile feeling only inwardly. The hatred felt by a weak party sinks very deep. This anti-Muslim feeling became permanent because the focus of its attention remained permanent.

Brahmanism would not accept a foreigner in its fold, nor take back one of its own who had once been converted to Islam, even though forcibly. The Islamic penalty for an apostate was death. Therefore, the assimilation of Muslims in Hindu fold was ruled out. The Muslim practice of Shariat did not content itself with the acceptance by outsiders of its purely spiritual and social ideals. More than that, it made the exclusive allegiance to the authority of the Prophet and Koran a primary obligation. The intensity of the belief with which proselytization to be Islamic fold was regarded as a religious duty, and the fanatical zeal with which this duty was pursued, made matters worse.

Thus, for the first time in the history of India, there came into existence two permanently hostile camps on the basis of diverse religions, cultures and social values. This left little scope for synthesis, or of assimilation of one by the other. It is not presumed that the process of adjustment and harmonization between the Hindus and the Muslims was not at work. It is always there when people realize that there is no alternative to living side by side; and in this case the vast majority of the Muslims were recent converts from the common stock. But, there is no denying the fact that the cleavage between these two groups was far too wide and deep for the forces of harmony to be of much significance. This is proved by the subsequent events. For, after the lapse of centuries and despite the influences of the Bhakti movement and the Western culture, this cleavage led to the formation of Pakistan.

What is, however, unfortunate is that the birth of Hindu group-consciousness coincided with a period when the social reaction in the pre-Muslim India society had become supreme. The liberal social trends in the Krishna cult had been engulfed by orthodox reaction, and Buddhism had been completely vanquished. Only Orthodoxy was left in the field. The Hindus could not longer take comfort in their military prowess. This deficiency, they tried to cover with their anti-Muslim hatred. Nor could they claim that their social system did more social justice than did the Islamic society. Nor would they, in order to face the challenge, reorientate their social system so as to secure greater social justice and equality than in the Muslim society.

The only thing they could fall back upon was pride in their religion, scriptures, tradition, and culture, which they believed to be superior to any other ones. The caste system was a part and parcel of this complex which was called Hindu Dharma. As the Muslim rule destroyed the political sanction behind the caste system, large chunks of the suppressed sections of the society broke loose and embraced Islam. All proselytic activity became a one-way traffic. Hinduism was entirely on the defensive. In order to preserve itself, the more it was attacked and oppressed, the more rigid and socially reactionary it became. In this process, Hindu nationalism became identified more and more closely with social reaction. This it has not been able to

shake of completely even upto now. In this way, under the grab of Hindu nationalism, social reaction became superimposed on the Brahmanical Complex.

This further complicated the Gordianknot, which the passage of time has found difficult to unravel. For, even till today, the link-up with the ancient culture, which is attempted, is not directed merely towards deriving national strength, which is given by pride in one's glorious past, but towards strengthening bonds with the orthodox heritage. Only an extraneous attention is paid to Buddhism and its achievements, even though the Buddhist contribution is in no way less Indian and profound than the Orthodox one. The fact was the Hindu nationalism had not been able to disentangle itself from the Brahmanical complex, and, more often than not, it looked towards it for inspiration. Under this spell, even what was palatably unjust was sought to be justified. Here is a modern instance of a sophisticated attempt to justify caste: "Caste resolved function into a purpose, into something like an ethical principle, almost a religious conception, and exhaled the group to the detriment of individual values. This is one of the reasons why Hindu political theory speaks frequently of the duties, but rarely of the rights of the individual. In society, individuality derives its worth and significance from its contribution of service to the universal whole. Personality is thus taught to transcend itself by giving its attention to something beyond itself."⁸

It is an acknowledged fact that the caste downgraded and degraded socially an overwhelming section of the society in which it operated in a manner and on a scale which is really without a parallel. Where was that 'universal whole' when this 'ethical principle' and 'almost a religious concept' was supposed to serve, and to what noble 'purpose'? and, why was the personality of the Sudra specially sighed out to bear the main burden of 'transcending itself'? Was it because, of all others, he was the one who had been more suitably prepared for the ethical exercise by denying to him the right of even hearing the Vedas? It is also not understood why the 'purpose', the 'ethical principle' or the 'religious conception' of the higher castes never include in its transcended ideal if 'service to the universal whole' the service of the downgraded Sudra ?

A great tragedy of the Hindu-Muslim antagonism was that political and economic issues could not be seen in their proper perspective. The polarization of the masses into Hindu and Muslim camps suited the interests for the ruling class of both the communities; because, it blind-folded the masses to the political domination and the economic exploitation of the rules and to their religious and social domination by their own elite, Their indifference towards the problem of economic exploitation is understandable, because this question had not till then been focussed in relief on the consciousness of that age. In normal circumstance, Indian Muslims should have made common cause with the Hindus against political or economics advantages with them. But, inspire of this, the vast majority of Indian Muslims ardently wished the continuation and the extension of the rule of Nawabs and Sultans. The majority of the Indian Muslims were converts from the despised sections of the Hindu society. The Islamic society had given them greater social equality. At least, there were no impassable religious barriers to aspirant talent and industry. Moreover, by being Muslims they felt the elation of belonging to the ruling community, and of thus being superior to their former mentors in the Hindu society. The disappearance, or the weakening, of the Muslim rule, therefore, meant to them the prospect of losing their newly acquired social gains, howsoever unsubstantial materially these might have been.

The caste system was constitutionally based on social inequality and social injustice. The universalism of Islam, so far as non-Muslims were concerned, was severely curtailed by the accepted Shariatic practices. Thus, for the Non-Muslims, the hatred and persecution reserved for the Kafir further hampered the Islamic ideal of the brotherhood of man. The great tragedy of this hatred between the Kafir and the Malecha was the humanistic values got pushed to the background.

CHAPTER VII

The Radical Bhakti Ideology- Its Social Significance

The Radical Bhakti movements, starting with Namdev, was also one of the liberal trends which ultimately succumbed to the orthodox caste order and its ideology. These humanistic Bhaktas were ideologically opposed both to the theory of caste and the narrow interpretations given to Islam by the bigoted Mullahs, In the earlier chapters we purposely omitted to refer to their role as it deserves separate treatment, especially because in certain respects their ideology has distinct and close affinities with that of the Sikh Gurus. We shall call these Bhaktas as belonging to the Radial Bhakti School.

The overwhelming emphasis on Bhakti or devotion has be to the erroneous impression that the entire Bhakti movement was a purely religious upsurge. This wrong impression is there partly because some of the Bhakti saints, e.g. Mirabai, were so much absorbed in their religious devotion that they never touch the social aspects for religion. Nevertheless, the social import of the teachings of one of the Bhakti schools, as we shall see, cannot be denied. Also, it would be equally misleading to regard Bhakti-marga as a uniform school of thought. There were deep differences in the theological and the social ideologies of the different Bhakti schools. "a whole world of difference lies between the Bhagavatism of the reformation and that of the Bhagavadgita."¹ Within the Bhakti school of the so-called reformation itself, there were ideological variations from one Bhakta (saint) to another. The objects of devotion of some of these were sectarian deities, while other preached unalloyed monotheism. A part from these theological distinctions,

the differences in the social ideologies of the different Bhaktas were real and basic. Many of the Bhakti saints suggested reforms, here and there, in the ideology of the caste-order, but did not venture to disturb its framework in unequivocal terms. Kabir, and some other saints, challenged in a clearer-cut manner the very ideological basis of the caste system. Theirs was a call for a radical social change. It is for this reason that we have, in order to differentiate them from the other Bhaktas, called them the Radical Bhaktas. In this Chapter, we are only concerned with their ideological break with the past their uncompromising stand against the orthodox social ideology.

1. The Caste order

The Radical Bhakti School preached unalloyed monotheism, viz, the fatherhood of one Universal God and the brotherhood of man. These theological concepts had far-reaching social implications, because these cut across the sectarian and hierarchical social values of the sanctified caste order under which men were in principle unequal. As against this, these Bhaktas make it specifically clear that, "all men are created out of one light, there is no difference between them."² Kabir challenged the Brahmin to show, "If you are a Brahmin, why were you not born in a different way"? In what way you are a Brahmin and I am a (Sudra)... How you are milk (i.e. pure) and I am blood (i.e. impure)³. Such hymns clearly show that her approach of the Radical Bhaktas towards the problem of human equality was fundamentally different from that of the Brahmanical system. This change forms a significant landmark in the social thought-currents in India.

There are hymns in which the Radical Bhaktas directly repudiate the validity of caste. "Saith Kabir, renounce family, caste and lineage."⁴ "Saith Ravi Das, he who repeateth God's name hath no concern with caste, or birth, or transmigration."⁵ However, as they hymns are couched in religious idiom, it might be argued that these Bhaktas conceded only religious equality and not social equality. But, the Radical Bhaktas attacked the pillars on which the super-structure of the caste order rested. Any call to demolish these pillars was in substance a call to destroy the caste system. Surely, something more

than a mere call was needed. But that is a different matter, for here we are dealing with the argument whether or not the Radical Bhakti ideology made a major and a clear dent in the caste ideology.

In the social background as it existed, any attack on the props and the ideology of the caste structure was a direct blow to the system itself. It is for this purpose that we singled out the pillars on which the caste order rested and pointed out the social relevance of these pillars to the maintenance and working of the caste system (chapter iv). There is no doubt that the Radical Bhaktas, some of them atleast, attacked all the foundations of the caste structure. As already seen, they preached the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, and thus challenged the inequitous religious and social values on which the caste order was based. The human kingpin of the caste-system, the Brahmin Levite caste, was ridiculed and its prestige humbled. The repudiation of the authority of Vedas and other related scriptures sought to destroy the religious sanction behind caste. The condemnation of rituals and customs connected with caste undermined its ceremonial sanctification. The rejection of theory and practice of pollution, and the restrictions of food and drinks, sought to eliminate one of the most potent means of the propagation of caste exclusiveness. To avoid loading the main text, the relevant hymns of these Bhaktas are given in Appendix C. The perusal of these hymns, in the context of their relevance to the factors which helped to maintain the caste order, would clearly show that the ideology of the Radical Bhaktas had both a social and a religious significance. In fact, the thoroughness with which they cover all the salient features of the caste ideology that upheld and maintained the caste order, and the vehemence with which they condemn them, make it clear enough that these savants regarded the caste order and its ideology, to say the least, as a hindrance to their religious approach and aims. Whether they denounced the caste ideology because of their religious approach, or because of their direct social concern, is immaterial. The fact remains that they attacked the caste ideology, and as its result the caste order, in unequivocal terms.

To argue that the Radical Bhaktas advocated human equality but were not opposed, or were indifferent, to the problem of caste, is

to suggest that human equality and caste are compatible. Again, to suggest that the Bhaktas attacked the pillars on which the caste system rested but not the system as such, is to show one's ignorance of the genesis of the caste order, its structure and its functioning. It would be futile to maintain that the super-structure of caste order could remain intact even though the pillars were demolished. In fact, it is exactly by the contribution made by these factors, individually or in their several combinations, that the solidification of classes into castes could take place in India.

2. Universalism

Another component of the ideology of the Radical Bhaktas, having great social significance, was its non-sectarian, universal and human approach. Musalmans said that Kabir was an infidel and the Hindus regarded him as a Musalman.⁶ When Kabir was enquired about his caste and sect (Bhesh), he replied that he was only Kabir. Their hymns clearly show that these saints were above considerations of caste, class and sect. Their universalism was not qualified, nor made exclusive, by tying it down to the authority of a particular teacher or scripture. Their first and foremost allegiance was to God and what they believed was to be truthful living beings. They accepted truth from whatever sources it came and rejected all that did not conform to it. One corollary of this approach was that they neither accepted, nor rejected, in toto any religious teacher or scripture. On the one hand, they urge the seeker to discover the essential truth in all scriptures. "Calleth not Veda (Hindu scriptures) and Katebs (Muslim scriptures) false; false is he who does not dive into there true essence."⁷ On the other hand, they do not hesitate to condemn religious institutions and literature that uphold caste and racial prejudice. The above quotation cannot be taken to mean that Radical Bhaktas were Hindu reformists. Because, by the same logic they can equally well be called Muslim reformists. But, they were neither; they were humanists, first and last, and propounded a new thesis.

In the context of Kafir Vs. Malech confrontation, this universalism of the Bhaktas had great social significance. Its full implication can be grasped only if one casts even a cursory

glance at the events that led to the creation of Pakistan. It was not in the best political and economic interests of both the Hindus and Muslim masses that the country should have been partitioned. But it was because of the emotional involvement associated with religious sentiments that millions of Muslims and non-Muslims left their properties, sacrificed their interests, and migrated to new lands, taking a leap into the dark at least so far as their economic future was concerned. If this could happen after being subjected to centuries of Western cultural influence, with its secular and scientific outlook, one can easily imagine to what extent this Kafir-Malecha emotional antagonism must, in the medieval times, have overshadowed all political and economic issue. In an era, when religion was, in India at least, the only vehicle for bringing about social changes, this universal approach of the Bhaktas could be the only antidote to the Kafir-Malecha confrontation, and the way to promote human values. The attitude of the Sufis in India makes this point clear. Many of these Sufi saints were themselves active proselytizers for Islam. Those who were not, were at best indifferent, because we do not come across any prominent instance where they protested against the religious persecution of the Hindus. It was the distinction of Kabir and the Radical Bhaktas that they had a respectful image both among the Hindus and the Muslims. In fact, it is their anti-caste and universal approach that mainly distinguishes the Radical Bhakti school from orthodox Hinduism and orthodox Islam on the one hand, and from the Indian Sufis and the other devotional Hindus saints on the other.

3. Their Role

Some writers are at pains to assert that the Bhakti movement was a reformist movement which sought to reform Brahmanism from within. This may be true of the sectarian Bhakti schools of Vaisnavism and Saivism, which were all wedded to the orthodox fold. But, we find that Kabir and some other Radical Bhaktas constitute an altogether different category. It has not been possible to define precisely what Hinduism is. Crooke sums up thus: 'Hinduism thus provides a characteristic example of the primitive unorganized polytheism, an example probably unique among the races of the modern world.

‘This is due to the fact that all such action (attempt at organisation) is essentially opposed to its spirit and traditions...

‘The links that bind together this chaotic mass of rituals and dogmas are, first, the great acceptance of the Veda, representing under this term the ancient writings and traditions of the people, as the final rule of belief and conduct; secondly, the recognition of the sanctity of the Brahman Levite caste as the custodians of this knowledge and the only competent performers of sacrifice and other ritual observances, though the respect paid to them varies in different parts of the country; thirdly, the veneration for sacred places; fourthly, the adoption of Sanskrit as the one sacred language; fifthly, the general veneration for the cow.’⁸

The Radical Bhakti school unequivocally repudiated the authority of the orthodox scriptures and tradition, ridiculed the sanctity of the Brahman Levite caste, condemned the veneration for sacred places, denied the theory of Avtar hood, and deliberately used the vernaculars for the expression of their ideology. Probably, most of the Radical Bhaktas did not know Sanskrit at all. They are silent about the veneration for cow. Perhaps, they never attached any significance to it. Atleast, they did not advocate it. Thus, this school without doubt cut off all those links which, according to Crooke, bind one to Hinduism. Besides this, the Radical Bhaktas completely rejected the sectarian Hindus gods and goddesses, Avtaras, ritualism and ceremonialism, idol and temple worship, pilgrimages and fasts, scholasticism, etc. If all these ideas and institutions were substracted from Brahmanism, no essential residue to it could be left which the Radical Bhaktas were out to reform.

The main plank of the Radical saints is the uncompromising belief in monotheism and the methodology of Name as the sole means of achieving His Grace and God realization. Excepting these two fundamentals, they are not wedded to any particular dogma or philosophy. All other beliefs and practices attributable to them are only subsidiary or contributory. The Belief in one universal God is shared by the Mystics the world over. There is nothing peculiarly Hindu or Muslim about it. If anything, this concept of one universal God, and the passionate devotion towards Him as a means of mystic realization, came to be emphasized much earlier In Islam and Christianity than in India.

And the emotional heights that this devotion reached among the Muslim saints is hardly to be matched elsewhere.

This is only to refute the contention that the Bhaktas of the Radical school were Hindu reformers and not to suggest that they were anti-Hindu-formers and not to suggest anti-Muslim. Nor were they theological disputants or philosophers who revel in logical and argument. They were pure and simple mystics who claimed communion with God. From their mystic experience flowed their universal love, compassion and humanism. They were not out to criticize any sect or establish one of their own. Only, they were firm in the expression of their faith in universal humanism. They accept all that synchronized with their stand, irrespective of the source from which it came, and rejected all the did not. This is why the worship of Allah or Ram was the same to them , provided it denoted the God of their concept.

As a matter of fact, the Radical Bhaktas are more vocal in their criticism, both in volume and emphasis, of Brahmainism than of Islam. The Maharashtra saint Namdev calls the Muslims purblind and the Hindus blind.⁹ This is, again, not because these saints were anti-Hindu. It was because, in their fundamental religious and social approach, they were nearer Islam than Brahmanism, The concept of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, though made exclusive in the Shariatic practice, was common to both. This approach could not be ideology. Dr. Tara Chand has marshalled good evidence to show the medieval Bhakti movement itself was the product of the Islamic influence on the Indian culture. When ideologies differ on the fundamentals, their correspondence on secondary issues becomes irrelevant and without much significance, Undoubtedly, in their basic religious humanistic and social approach the Radical Bhaktas were nearer Islam than Hinduism. Therefore, it would be highly incongruous to call them Hindu reformers. Evidently, they were not the supporters of Islam either. The Muslims too came in for severe criticism for their dogmatic approach, for the rigid rules and practices of Shariat and for their religious exclusiveness and intolerance. The Radical Bhaktas were, thus, an independent liberal class by themselves and not reformers of this or that sect.

CHAPTER VIII

The Impact Of The Medieval Bhakti Movements

The medieval Bhakti movement did not have much of practical social impact mainly because of two reasons. It did not attempt to mobilize for purposeful action the social aspirations of the people it had aroused. Secondly, it did not realize that it as essential, even for its sheer existence, to make a complete organizational break with the caste society.

1. Aspirations not mobilized

Grierson writes : 'No one who reads the Indian religious literature of the 15th and following centuries can fail to notice the gulf that lies between the old and the new. We find ourselves in the face of the greatest revolution that India has ever seen- greater than even that of Buddhism, for its effects have persisted to the present day. Religion is no longer a question of knowledge. It is one of emotion. We visit a land of mysticism and rapture, and meet spirits akin, not to the school men of benders, but to the poets and mystics of medieval Europe in sympathy with Bernad of Clairvaux, with Thomas a Kempis, with Rackhert and with St. Theresa. In the early yea of the reformation, the converts lived in an atmosphere of the highest spiritual exaltation, while over all there hovered, with healing in its wings, a divine gospel of love, smoothing down inevitable aspirates, restoring breaches, and reconciling conflicting modes of thought. Northern India was filled with wandering devotees vowed to poverty. Purity of visions, raptures,

and even reputed miracles, were of everyday occurrence. Rich noblemen abandoned all their possessions and gave them to the poor, and even the poorest would lay aside a bundle of sticks to light a fire for some chance wandering saint.¹

This religious commotion might have affected many people of all classes and castes, because the human spirit must have been sick at heart of the prevalent atmosphere of hierarchism, sectarianism, disputations and hatred, and longed for a healing breath of humanism. But, it was the poorer classes that were drawn towards the medieval Bhakti saints in large numbers. 'It now became as fully the right of the despaired classes, of Musalmans, and of unclean leather-workers, as of people of repute. From Ramanand's time it was to the poor that the gospel was preached, and that in their language, not in a form of speech holy but unintelligible.'² 'In the North, Vaihnnavism first affected the lower strata of society and proceeded upward in its conversion.'³ 'The religion of the Maharashtra saints dominated the thoughts of the lower and middle class from the eleventh and twelfth century to our own day.'⁴ The followers of Kabir are mostly weavers and those of Rai Das mostly leather cleaners.⁵

The upsurge of emotions evoked by the Bhakti movement has been ascribed to certain spiritual and emotional needs of the people. It may be partly true, but it is not a complete explanation, unless one is to believe that the lower castes were greater than those of the upper castes. For the same reason, the conversions to Islam cannot be wholly ascribed to the appeal purely of Islamic doctrines and theology, because this fact has to be taken into account that the bulk of voluntary conversions to Islam in India came from the peasant and the lower castes. Moreover, it has also to be explained why the concept of devotional Bhakti, though introduced earlier, took several centuries to grow, and developed into a full-fledged Bhakti wave only during the Muslim period, and why the medieval Bhakti movement cooled down after the initial momentum gained by it. It cannot be asserted that the spiritual and the emotional needs of the people wax and wane periodically.

How ideas take root and flourish is in no small measure determined by the social milieu and the environmental factors. Therefore, it should not be ignored that the emotional upsurge of the Bhakti movements was closely related, in the case of the

lower castes atleast, to the social aspirations of the people. Among the masses, it aroused great hopes of delivery from the religious and social oppression of the Brahmanical order; because the movement condemned in unequivocal language the Brahmanical social values and the props on which the caste order rest. Prof. Habib implies that the conversion to Islam of the lower caste people was, by and large, voluntary.⁶ As such, the flocking of the poor around the standard of revolt raised against the Brahmanical ideology and the social order by the Radical Bhaktas, may be regarded as a parallel movement whose genesis is more or less the same as that of conversions to Islam. Those who were suppressed and degraded by the caste system saw an opportunity for gaining social justice. The urge of the down-trodden from securing liberation has often found expression under religious garbs. The rapid spread of Islam outside India was largely due to the emphasis it placed on the principle of human equality. This expansion was no primarily due to emotional factors. For, the intense religious emotionalism of the Sufis was introduced later and at a time when the peak of Islam's expansionist phase had passed over. Buddhism also had its appeal in its democratic spirit. Bhagvatism became more popular than the old Brahmanical religion because, although it remained rooted to the Varna Ashrama Dharma, it partly opened its gates for the religious participation by the masses. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Radical Bhakti ideology caught the imagination of the masses, because its gospel was directed against the Brahmanical order which enslaved them.

Although the medieval Bhakti ideology, in its purely religious aspect, continues, as Grierson says, to inspire people even to the present day, it remained, from the social angle, a mere ideological declaration. It may be conceded that it met, and continues to meet, certain types of emotional needs of some people. But, mass movements seeking social change cannot be made out of the stuff of sentiments alone. In order to transform the ardour of the people into sustained social action or movements, it is essential that their emotions should be related to their social aspirations and requirements. There is no evidence to suggest that the medieval Bhaktas, or their followers, attempted even to move in this direction. Their message aroused the

expectations of the down-trodden masses, but no one attempted to fulfil those aspirations. As such, the gospel of these Bhaktas remained confined, at its best, only to the field of religious inspiration.

Niharranjan Ray has expressed the view that, 'Agriculture being the main prop of Indian social economy and hence land the main focal interest for centuries past, early Indian society built up slowly and steadily a social organisation in which all social and economic professions and occupations, from priesthood, intellectual and scholastic pursuits, kingship and military vocations to leather tanning and scavenging, were arranged in a vertically stratified hierarchical order based on birth and biological heredity. This order being jati, know today to English-knowing people as caste (wrongly, to my mind), revolved primarily round land and agriculture and only secondarily round trade and commerce and arts and crafts. Jati was thus not merely a socio-religious system but also a system of production and hence an economic system; indeed, it was a very complex system into which was woven a pattern of social, religious and economic relationships in a vertically hierarchical order based on birth, as I said before.'⁷

It is not relevant to our subject to discuss the genesis of the caste. But, we have to point out the inadequacy of the view expressed above, because Niharranjan Ray form it the basis for drawing a lop-sided inference. We have been stressing the point that caste is qualitatively different from class. The rudiments of social exclusiveness and rigidity, which had the potentialities of developing into caste like formations, were present in other countries as well, but nowhere else these developed into a caste system like that of India.⁸ At that period, when the Indian caste system developed, agriculture 'was the main prop,' and hence land 'the main focal interest for centuries past', of not only of Indian social economy but of that of the economy of many other countries. The Indian agricultural productive system was just one of the many variations of feudal patterns prevailing in the world. It has not been shown, much less proved, how these petty variations could lead to caste formation in one case only and to class formations in all others. Apart from the points made in the earlier chapters, the comparison of caste with

analogous institutions in other countries clearly shows that it was the caste ideology, with its religious sanction, taboos and magical notions, which was principally responsible for the formation and consolidation of castes. The jati revolved primarily not round land and agriculture but round the caste ideology and its ideologues. The Brahmins, as seen, were the ideologues of the caste system as well as its kingpin, but, they as a caste, did not enter into agriculture productive relations in a big way. In fact, persons doing agriculture were categorised in to a lower caste and a higher caste person resorting to the use of plough was downgraded in the caste hierarchy. Besides, economic factors explain neither the hereditary basis of caste nor the institution of pollution. To attribute caste and its continuation to economic factors is too simplistic a view that misses the basis and implications of the caste. It is not argued that economic forces do not create social distinctions. But, the caste-status was given precedence over economic status. In this context, it is not a correct view to assume, as Niharranjan Ray does,⁹ that all liberal movements, which aimed at the abolition caste, failed chiefly because they did not attempt to, or could not, change the priveailing agriculture system of product. The change of the economic system was not more necessary in India for the abolition of social distinctions than it was elsewhere. We have already seen that it was the caste system and not class distinctions that hindered the free development and progress of the Indian economy on the Western lines. Caste is more than a mere economic differentiation; it indicates a social status. Caste persists even among groups between which there are no economic relationships at all. 'Even if there are no antogonisms of economic interests, a profound estrangement usually exists between the castes, and often deadly jealousy and hostility as well, precisely because castes are completely oriented towards social rank.¹⁰ The Chuhra (Sweeper) and the Mochi (cobbler) in a village remain a Chuhra and a Mochi to the higher castes in the surrounding villages and towns, even though they may have no direct occupational contacts with them. Similarly, there are sub-castes within the same occupational levels. We have seen that Telis who press oil are out-castes, whereas those who deal in oil are not. Also, there are pollution gradations among the untouchables.¹¹ All that we want to emphasize

is that to connect the caste purely or mainly with the economic system is an over-simplification that confuses the main issue. We are here dealing mainly with caste and not class. The Radical Bhakti school failed to have any appreciable social impact mainly because it did not show the masses the way to shake off their caste shackles. Nor were they led by it to do so.

2. The Caste Ambit

The Radical Bhakti ideology made a strong frontal attack on the ideological base of the caste system, and its contribution in this respect is no to be under-rated. But, the Radical Bhaktas, somehow, did not take into account the patent fact that the caste ideology had institutionalised itself into a hidebound social system. All institutions and systems, once developed, have apart from their ideological basis, a compulsive mechanism and a drive of their own. Max Weber writes, 'Ones established, the assimilative power of Hinduism is so great that it tends even to integrate social forms considered beyond its religious borders. The religious movements of expressly anti-Brahmanical and anti-caste character, that is contrary to one of the fundamentals of Hinduism, have been in all essentials returned to the caste order.'

'The process is not hard to explain. When a principled anti-caste sect recruits former members of various Hindu castes and tears them from the context of their former ritualistic duties, the caste responds by excommunicating all the sect's proselytes. Unless the sect is able to abolish the caste system altogether, instead of simply tearing away some of its members, it becomes, from the standpoint of the caste system, a quasi-guest folk, a kind of confessional guest community in an ambiguous position in the prevailing Hindu Order.'¹² And what happens to the excommunicated person has been noted earlier.

As pointed out by Max Weber, there were only two alternatives before the anti-caste movements: either to abolish the caste system or to be engulfed by it. As the abolition of the caste system at one stroke could happen only through a miracle, the only practical way was to form a society outside the caste system and give it a battle from outside. None of the medieval Bhaktas, or their followers, made a determined attempt to found a society outside the caste orbit. The natural result

followed. These Bhakti sects were either wholly absorbed in the caste society, or remained attached to it as an appendage of one kind or the other. As soon as the pioneer savants disappeared from the scene, even the theological distinctions got readily blurred and their followers relapsed into Brahmanism. 'Ramanandis today are quite as orthodox as ordinary Hindus are. In every Ramanandi temple today the priest is a brahman.'¹³ 'The goal of Chaitanya was lost when his church passed under the control of Brahman Goswamis,'¹⁴ 'Kabir's followers now occupy a position between idolatry and monotheism',¹⁵ and some of them have almost completely succumbed to Brahmanical influence. 'The kabirpanthies, in consequence of their paying more respect to Vishnu than the other members of the Hindu triad, are always included among the Vaishnava sects and maintain, with most of them, the Ramawants especially, a friendly intercourse and political alliance. It is no part of their-faith, however, to worship any Hindu deity, or to observe any of the rites or ceremonials of the Hindu deity, or to observe any of the rites or ceremonials of the Hindus, whether orthodox or schismatically. Such of their members as are living in the world conform outwardly to all the usage of their tribes and castes....'¹⁶ 'And there is no doubt that in the early times, i.e. in the 13th to 16th centuries, distinction of caste was not observed in and about the temple precincts at Pandharpur. Many of the famous saints were Mahars. There was a love-feast called the Gopalkala at all the festivals, at which all castes dined together. But gradually the tremendous power of caste reasserted itself, Distinctions began to arise; and today the lowest castes are not allowed within the temple at all, but worship at the 'Panduka' of a Mahar saint named Chokhamela. All religious revivals in India beginning from Buddhism have had the abolition of caste inequalities as their main basis. All have failed.'¹⁷

The Kabirpanthies never attempted to organize themselves as a distinct entity outside the caste society. This is equally true of the other Radical Bhaktas and their followers, even though their period of Muslim rule was a more favourable opportunity for the achievement of this aim than the earlier times, when all anti-caste liberal movements were subjected to the full weight of Hindu political sanction. The conversions Hindus mostly from

the low castes to Islam were, by and large, voluntary. Therefore, if large sections of the low caste could embrace Islam, and in the process cut themselves off completely from the Hindu fold, socio-religious communities could also be organized outside the caste society and used to break the shackles of the caste order. But, there is no evidence to show that the Bhaktas ever aspired to do so. They made no attempt to change the caste society or build a new one outside its orbit.

It has been seen that caste orthodoxy consistently succeeded in eliminating, absorbing or remoulding, for its reactionary ends all liberal social trends and movements appearing on the Indian soil. The caste system had become a continuously downgrading apparatus. It cast its shadows even outside its borders to affect, to an extent, even the Indian Muslims and Charistians. The consistent history of the caste system, spread over two millennia, shows that there was no scope for a radical social change, much less for a social revolution, by remaining within the frame-work of the society and its ideology. It could not be reformed from within, because its every constituent, every cell, was built on the principle of social inequity and hierarchy. Both on ideational and on historical grounds, one has perforce to come to the conclusion that, for its very survival, it was imperative for any anti-caste ideology or movement to organise society outside the orbit of caste. This necessity appears far more imperative when viewed in the light of the caste mechanism and its inexorable working. Individuals, even groups, were helpless against the pressures and sanctions exercised by the caste organisation. No individual, except those who like the mendicants cut themselves off from society, could be a member of the Hindu society without belonging to one sub-caste or the other. Unless organised to withstand these pressure, it was idle to expect of the masses to be able to toe the anti-caste line on their own. No people can hang in the air outside one society or the other. By omitting to take any organisational steps and ideological plane, the Radical Bhaktas stopped short in the logical pursuit of their social ideology. Hence, their ultimate failure in the social field.

CHAPTER IX

The Sikh Ideology

What the Radical Bhaktas could not do, the Sikh Gurus did. They created an egalitarian society (Sikh Panth) outside the caste society and made it the spring-board for giving shape to a revolutionary movement. But, before we come to discuss these developments, it is necessary to understand the Gurus' view of life, because it is not possible to appreciate the significance of the Sikh movement without understanding the Sikh thesis is highly integrated in its conception. In fact, it is so radical, new and creative in character that it has led to many misunderstandings about its world-view. Another factor that has caused a lot of misconception about it is the background in which Sikhism appeared. Brahmanism being a medley variety of creeds and cults, embracing even conflicting and contradictory system, there is a lazy tendency to regard Sikhism as off-shoot of the orthodox cultural complex. But, the growth of Sikhism in India is so exceptional that there is hardly a common essential between Sikhism and the traditional Indian religions. For this reason, it is necessary for us to give a brief outline of the main traditional socio-religious trends and the corresponding Sikh approach.

1. The Traditional Background and Approach

The course of all religious, social and political evolution, up to the time of the Gurus, had been steered, or greatly influenced, by three dominant factors. The first was the overriding social and political consideration of preserving the Varna Ashrama Dharma; the second was the individualistic and quietist approach of life; and the third was the doctrine of Ahimsa. No social or political movement, which went

against the fundamentals of the caste ideology, could arise out of the orthodox creeds, because that would negate Orthodoxy. The Buddhists and the Radical Bhaktas were not bound down to the caste ideology, but both shared, in varying degrees, the quietist approach to life. M. Hiriyana writes, 'These are the two elements common to all Indian thought — the pursuit of Moksa as the final ideal and the ascetic spirit of the discipline recommended for its achievement.'¹ Both these elements implied a negative view of life. The dominant refrain of the Indian religions was that the world was unreal or a place of suffering. Life was a bondage from which release had to be obtained by cutting oneself away, as far as possible, from the world of activity and resorting to meditational or ascetic practices. From the sociological point of view, this approach to life was pessimistic, individualistic and anti-social. Pessimism was such a prominent feature that the Greeks noted that 'Death is with them (Brahmans) a very frequent subject of discourse.'^{1a} In the case of the orthodox schools, this view of life was further compounded by the paramount consideration of preserving the caste order. Lord Krishna is the only prominent Indian prophet who propounded the philosophy of Karma (activity) in the Bhagavadgita, but in the same text he is said to be the author of Varna Ashrama Dharma. Therefore, this Karma, in its application, meant nothing beyond the performance of ritualistic duties, as in the Vedic religion, or of the prescribed caste duties as advocated by the orthodoxy. All activity had strictly to be within the orbit of the caste structure.

Similarly, although Mahayana Buddhists took a prominent part in alleviating human suffering, they were inhibited from tackling political problems by their adherence to the doctrine of Ahimsa (non-violence) and by their regarding the world as a place of suffering. 'It is well known how Buddhism turned into peaceful nomads the Mongolian hordes, who in the 13th century devastated the whole of Iran, Western Asia, and south-eastern Europe.'^{1b} Buddhism eschewed the use of force for any purpose whatsoever, and gave the doctrine of Ahimsa a prominent place in its scheme of religious propaganda. In Jainism the application of this principle covered even the smallest of living beings. Later on, Brahmanism also partly accepted this approach. The

cumulative result of all the three limiting factors was to help maintain the social status quo and entrench social reaction in the form of the caste order. All purposeful revolutionary movement towards human liberty and equality was either discounted or barred.

2. The Sikh World-view*

The Sikh movement deliberately built up a society outside the caste society. It was also the only people's movement of Indian origin which strove to capture political power for humanistic ends and objectives. In the context of the Indian tradition referred to above, both these developments could not be fortuitous. A great conscious and sustained effort was needed to go against and overcome the hardened traditional trends and rigidly fixed social alignments. This needed a new and original ideology, a clear-cut direction, a committed organization and a determined leadership. Here, we shall briefly state the rationale of the Sikh thesis, which, in its logical execution, required of the Sikh movement a complete reversal of the traditional trends.

Before stating the Sikh view of life, we should like to make one point clear. Many of the misinterpretations of the Sikh thesis and the Sikh movement are, in no small measure, due to the Sikh Gurus having used old Indian religious idiom and terminology for the expression of their gospel. In the Indian tradition, all spheres of life, whether social, political or economic, had, in one form or the other, religious implication or connotation. Even ordinary rules of human behaviour and hygiene conceived and expressed in religious idiom. In this background, the urge for social and political and political change could properly be understood and appreciated by the people only through the language of religion. It is not at all suggested that the Sikh Gurus used religion as a mask to cover their social aims. For them, the tackling of all problems of life was an integral part of their religion itself. It has to be emphasised that, in Sikhism, the entire field of life was contemplated, covered and moulded by religious precepts. As such

social ideas and urges could not be an exception. For this purpose, the Gurus put their own meaning and content into the old Indian religious terminology. This fact is in itself a sufficient indication to show that the Gurus did not want their movement to remain confined to the traditional concept of the religious sphere of activity. It also indicates the direction in which they wanted their movement to move.

(a) *The World is real*

The Sikh Gurus regard the world's real and meaningful. "True is he, True is His creation."² "By despising the world, one gets not to God."³ Deride not the world, it is the creation of God."⁴ This Sikh thesis made a major breakaway from the traditional Indian thought, which, including Buddhism, regarded the world with indifference or as a place of suffering, and made the attainment of release, salvation (*Moksa* or *Mukti*) or spiritual bliss the bell and end-all of all religious endeavour.

(b) *Moksa*

The world being real, object is not to secure a release from life, but to strive for a moral and spiritual living. God-centred activity and not salvation is the goal. In the first place, the importance "He who is fond of God, what has he to do with *Mukti* or heaven."⁵ "*Mukti* techniques and many a comfort and felicity cannot equal love of God."⁶ Guru Gobind Singh changed the title of Nand Lal's composition from *Bandginama* (meditational path) to *Zindginame* (The way to live.)⁷ Secondly, the idea of *Mukti* was given a new content. It meant release from self-centredness, selfishness and individualism and not from the world. In fact, *Mukti* was linked to the service of humanity. "By service in the world alone one finds a place in God's Court."⁸

(c) *Social involvement*

The second corollary of the world being real is that one should not shun life or run away from it. Full participation in life is advocated. Guru Nanak's first utterance after his enlightenment was, "There is no Hindu, no mussalman,"⁹ "This is an

announcement of supreme significance. It declared not only the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God, but also his clear and primary interest not in any metaphysical doctrine but only in man and his fate. In addition, it emphasised, simultaneously, the inalienable spirituo-moral combination of his message.”¹⁰ “The kind-hearted Baba Nanak could not bear to see others in grief.”¹¹ He told Shah Sharaf that those men who love their fellow beings come out successful in this world.”¹²

In consequence of his ideology, one great practical step Guru Nanak took for the social involvement of his creed was to establish the primacy of the householder’s life. It was such a big departure from the religious tradition that the Naths accused Guru Nanak of putting acid in the pure milk of religious life in order to spoil it.”¹³ ‘In his (Guru Nanak’s) system, the householder’s life became the primary forum of religious activity. His was not a concession to the laity. In fact, the normal life became the medium of spiritual training and expression.’¹⁴ The Gurus offered householder’s life not only as an alternative, but made it of primary importance for the seeker. Guru Angad and Guru Amadas explicitly excluded the Udasis, who led a celibate and ascetic life, from the Sikh fold.¹⁵ He Sikh gurus, excepting Guru Harkishan who died at a tender age, were themselves married householders.

Another major practical step to wean people away from an ascetic’s or a mendicant’s life was the Guru’s insistence on earning one’s bread by honest work. “The man incapable of earning a living gets his ears split (to become a Yogi) or becomes a mendicant. He calls himself a Guru or saint but begs for food from door to door, Never look upto such a person or touch his feet. He knows the right way who earns his living by hard work and shares his earning with others.”¹⁶

3. The Unitary View of Life

The caste ideology compartmentalized not only the society, but also orthodox ethics and religion. To take a unitary view of life and reconcile it with the hierarchical, inequitable and exploitative caste system was impossible. As the preservation of the caste order was the supreme consideration, truly religious life was circumvented or avoided lest it

should question the inhumanity of the caste system. Instead, all religious yearning was sidetracked into esoteric or other otherworldly fields. One course adopted was to let recluses, Naths Yogis, mendicants, Sanyasia and the like cut themselves away from the society and pursue their ideals in isolation without disturbing the caste order. The second course followed was to divorce religion itself from worldly life, especially from political life. How strong hold this narrow and irreligious view-point had on the Indian mind can be seen from the following excerpt from Rabindra Nath Tagore's writing; 'The liberation which Baba Nanak realized in his heart was not political liberty, but spiritual freedom. Nanak had called upon his disciples to free themselves from selfishness, from narrow bigotry, from spiritual lethargy, Guru Govind organized the Sikhs to suit a special purpose. He called in the human energy of the Sikhs from all other sides and made it flow in one particular channel only; they ceased to be full, free men. He converted the spiritual unity of the Sikhs into a means of worldly success,¹⁷ it is really sad how successfully the traditional approach, under the cover of spiritual freedom and salvation, continues to make even sensitive minds indulge in he make believe that spiritual freedom could be divorced from political liberty.

The Sikh view of religion is diametrically opposed to the traditional one given above. It does not permit of any dichotomy of life, or of any divorce of the individual from his society. Nor does it visualize that true religion and ethics can operate unconcerned beside an unjust social or political order; nor that spiritual freedom can co-exist with religious dictation and political slavery. The Sikh Gurus take a very comprehensive view of religion. Theirs is a unitary an integrated view of life. They do not look upon the individual as an entity detachable from society. As such the religious and spiritual problems of an individual cannot be divorced from the moral spiritual predicaments of the society as a whole. Personal salvation (Mukti), or remaining absorbed in spiritual bliss, is not the Sikh ideal. For the striving for moral spiritual progress is not an end in itself; it is a preparation to equip oneself for the better service of humanity. In fact, service of one's fellow-beings is indispensable for one's moral and spiritual growth. The real love of God is its transformation into love for man. For God

loves all men, the lowest and the down-trodden. According to the Sikh Gurus, religious moral and spiritual activity covers the totality of life of the individual as well as of the society. For, life is one whole and cannot be arbitrarily split up into separate religious, social or political spheres. Nor can it be ignored or left to take care of itself. For them, religion has to meet all the problems and challenges thrown up by life. Each and every activity of man is either God-oriented or self-oriented, viz., it is either for the uplift of man and his society or it is destructive. There cannot be a neutral position. Inaction and sloth are sins.

As a consequence of their unitary view, the Sikh Gurus gave the Sikh movement a two-pronged direction. The first was an emphasis on changing the value-patterns of the individual and that of the society. This was to bring about, what has come to be called in modern parlance, a cultural revolution. The second line was to change the inequitable social, religious and political set-ups. Both these processes were of one piece and for one overall purpose. They were complimentary to each other. None could be complete by itself. All social systems have to be run by men, and in the last analysis, their worth is determined by the character of the people who manage them. And, it is imperative that social, political and economic systems should be just, because these determine the development of the human personality.

1. Social Orientation

Sikhism, as did the Radical Bhaktas, condemned all those values on which the caste system was based. Some of the relevant hymns are given in appendix D. Here, we shall limit ourselves to those aspects of the value-system which distinguished the Sikh movement from the ideology of the Radical Bhaktas, as also from that of the earlier Indian tradition

a) Social Service

The Indian religious tradition laid almost exclusive emphasis on meditational, ascetic or Yogic practices as the means of attaining salvation or spiritual bliss. Social service was rarely made an obligatory part of religious practice. All moral life remained confined within the framework of the caste system, because complete allegiance to the social structure was a part of one's religious

obligations. Only Mahayana Buddhism made social service a part of its religion, but it had been hunted out from the land long before Guru Nanak. In this background, people could be led on only step by step to accepting new moral and religious codes. The first step was to make them conscious of their social obligations.

Thus Sikh Gurus made social service (sewa) a prerequisite to spiritual development. "Without service there cannot be any Bhakti."¹⁸ Social service is an essential component of the Sikh way of life even after the highest spiritual attainment. "Spontaneous service of others is in the very nature of the Brahmgyani." "Service should be regarded as the highest form of Bhakti."¹⁹ Service should be regarded as the highest form of Bhakti."²⁰ Service of fellow beings became such a cardinal feature of the Sikh movement that its importance is invariably stressed in the Sikh tradition and all the sources of its history.^{20a} After his world tours, Guru Nanak himself took to the cultivation of land.²¹ The produce from it went to the common kitchen which served the needy and all those who came to visit him. Guru Amardas had given standing instructions that if anybody was in suffering, he should immediately be informed so that he could be of help to him.²² Guru Arjan established a leper asylum at Tarn Taran. Guru Gobind Singh refused to accept water at the hands of a person who had not served anybody else earlier.²³ Paro was offered Guruship, but he respectfully declined and requested that instead he might be granted the boon of love for the service of man.²⁴ Ladha humiliated himself by blackening his face in order to help another person to get out of trouble. "The Guru praised Ladha in the open assembly and said that Ladha had won him over by his selfless service. Pilgrimages, sacrificial ritual and asceticism do not equal selfless service and Naam."²⁵

The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh society insisted on disinterested service of others. "He who performs disinterested service meets God."²⁶ In the Sikh terminology, the term Sewa itself meant only selfless service.

b) Individualism

The Sikh Gurus have repeatedly emphasized that Haumen, which in sociological terms may be rendered as individualism or

self-centredness, is at the root of all the ills from which an individual and the society suffer. It is true that in the Indian religious tradition, too, the imperative need of overcoming the five evil manifestations of Haumen, viz., lust, anger, greed, attachment and pride, has been stressed. But, there is a basic difference between the Sikh and the traditional approaches to the problem. Whereas, the Sikh thesis attacks the social and institutional manifestations of these evils, especially social and political aggrandizement, the orthodox religions fought shy of doing so; evidently because that would have meant condemning and eroding the caste structure. But, the Sikh movement actively struggled against the anti-social and anti-human institutions like the caste, inequality of status and sexes, and religious and political domination. This attack on these institutions forms the summum bonum of the Sikh movement.

2. Revolutionary Orientation

Had the concern for social welfare and the socialization of the concept of Mukti stopped at the level indicated so far, the chances were that the Sikh movement would have ended as only a reformist appendage of the caste society as did the Chaitanyaites or the Lingayats, or as a heterodox creed like the Mahayana devoted only to peaceful social service. But, the Sikh Gurus had revolutionary aims, which necessitated the employment of revolutionary means. To wean away people from the caste values was an uphill task. To lead the downtrodden, despondent and slumbering masses on to the revolutionary path was a still more difficult objective.

a) Mukti

The Gurus revolutionalized the content of Mukti and social service. They aimed at the complete emancipation of man. This involved not only gaining a higher consciousness for an individual, but also his total freedom from the fear of death, fear of insecurity, fear of oppression and injustice, and fear of what. "He who meditates on the Fearless One, loses all his fear."²⁷ "When Thou, O God, art on my side, I care not then for another. Yea, when I became Thine, Thou Blesseth me with all I seek. Inexhaustible is my Treasure howsoever I expend it."²⁸

If fact, these fears form the major afflictions of man, leading to all social and political conflicts and problems. In the social field, it is this fourfold total freedom that the Gurus aimed at. This has been their social-political ideology. It is to this total freedom that the ninth Guru refers when he says 'Fear not, frighten not.'²⁹ It is to safeguard this freedom that he sought martyrdom at Delhi.

Total freedom or liberation from fear is described in the Sikh parlance as Mukti. It became an article of firm faith of the Sikhs that Mukti was not release from the world but liberation from its fears. For them, to seek martyrdom in the battles fought for upholding a high or noble cause was Mukti. The forty Sikhs, both at Chamkaur and at Khidrana, who died fighting to the last man, are to this day called Muktas (i.e. those who have become Mukta) at the time of every Ardas (supplication at the end of a Sikh ceremony). To commemorate their memory, the name of Khidrana itself was changed to that of Muktasar, the place where the forty achieved Mukti or salvation. The last wish of those who laid their lives at Khidrana was that they did not want any worldly benefit or even Mukti; but that the Guru should accept them as his followers and forgive them for their earlier lapse of forsaking the cause and leaving Anandpur.³⁰ Serving the ideological cause is salvation and leaving it is evil.

b) Ahimsa

One great ideological hurdle in the revolutionary path, on which the Sikh Gurus wanted to lead their followers, was the odium attached to the use of force even for just social and religious purpose. Brahmanism did sanction the use of force for social and political purposes, but only for upholding the caste order and not for use against it. It was lawful for the kings to wage war for extending their kingdoms. One of their primary duties was to preserve the Varna Ashrama Dharma (caste systems) by all means at their disposal. But, Brahmanism did not permit the lower castes to take up arms against the ruling castes, whose vested interests, along with those of the Brahmins, lay in maintaining the caste society. Jainism and Buddhism went a step further. They eschewed the use of force for any purpose

whatsoever. The cumulative result of all these developments was that resort to arms was regarded as highly irreligious.

We do not wish to discuss theological and ethical issues in their theoretical abstractions. For, there can be no end to hairsplitting. Historical movements have to be viewed in the light of their social impact. The gap between a utopian dogma and its application to a concrete situation is illustrated in the case of Mahatma Gandhi himself. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru writes that there was, in Mahatma Gandhi, 'a remarkable and astonishing change, involving suffering of the mind and the pain of the spirit. In the conflict between the principle of non-violence... and India's freedom... the scales inclined to the later, and ultimately he agreed to the Congress participation in the second world war effort.'³¹ Again, at a 'prayer meeting the Mahatma struck an almost Churchillian note over Kashmir'.^{31a} The issues before the gurus were far too grave. One had to either resist or accept religious and political tyranny. There are no two opinions about the humiliation the Hindus suffered under the Mughal rule after Akbar. As the Muslim mystic Bulleh Shah has succinctly put it: "Had there been no Guru Gobind Singh, everybody would have been circumcised, viz., forced to become a Muslim."³² The Gurus never considered it moral or spiritual to remain absorbed in seeking the so-called Moksha, and to let the entire population suffer humiliation and degradation. This question had to be faced squarely, because there was no effective alternative. Guru Arjan suffered martyrdom in a peaceful manner. Though it created cohesion and strength among the Sikhs, it led to no change of policy by the rulers. The religious persecution of the Hindus became intense after Jahangir. Guru Nanak, in his dialogue with the Naths, had clearly deprecated the path of asceticism and renunciation involving unconcern, a euphemism for callousness, towards social and human problems.³³ As such, according to the Sikh thesis, armed resistance to tyranny is a religious duty.

Another spacious argument advanced against the taking up of arms for just purposes is that it defeats its own purpose, because violence has invariably ended in violence. But, the same can be said of all attempts to raise people above their egoistic level, because all idealistic movements, even though peaceful,

have come down to about the plan from where they started. The hard fact is that the progress of man towards his ideas is imperceptibly slow and the graph of this progress is never linear. There have to be ups and downs. Not to make an attempt on the account is to be cynical of human progress altogether. No historical evidence demonstrates that 'not to resist evil' has triumphed over evil by its own intrinsic logic and compulsion. Where it possible, there would have been no need for new religious, social or revolutionary movements to lead and guide mankind on the road to progress. In any case, the discipline of history can hardly accept the logic of this argument as a basis for its functioning.

The response of Guru Hargobind and of the later Gurus to the problem is unambiguous. All that we have to see is whether this response involve, as alleged by some scholars, a deviation from the thesis of Guru Nanak and his successors up to the period of Guru Hargobind. There is a long hymn of Guru Nanak which makes his attitude towards eating meat quite clear.

“One is first conceived in flesh, and then, abideth in flesh (of the womb),

And one's mouth and tongue are a flesh: yea, one's life is tied to flesh all around...

“Men know not Wisdom and quarrel over the affair,

Knowing not what is flesh and what is non-flesh, and which food is sinful and which is not...

“But they, who've abandoned meat and cannot stand even its flavour, devour men in the darkness of night.

They make a fetish of its before others, for, they know not Wisdom...

Born of the mother's and father's blood, lo one eateth not fish nor meat...

In the Puranas, as in the Semitic texts, is the mention of meat; through all the four ages, men have dealt with flesh...

All men, all women, are born of flesh, as are kings and chiefs, O Pundits !

If all these go to the hell, then why acceptest thou their gifts in charity ? ...

O Pundit, thou knowest not whence came all the flesh.

It is from water, like the foodgrains, the sugarcane, cotton, indeed the three worlds :... “³⁴

In this hymn, Guru Nanak emphasis that all life process has a common source. No animal life is possible without the use of flesh in one form or the other. He points out the fallacy of those who make a fetish of the question of eating meat, but have no scruples in ‘devouring’ (exploiting) men. All distinctions between non-vegetarian foods being impure and the vegetarian being pure are arbitrary, because the source of all life is the same elements. In fact, Guru Nanak himself cooked meat at Kurukshetra.³⁵ Meat was served in the Langar of his immediate successor, Gurn Angad, and that of the other Gurus that followed.³⁶

We have quoted extracts from the above hymn because the prohibition against non-vegetarian food arose as a corollary of the doctrine of non-violence or Ahimsa. Those who took non-vegetarian food lost estimation in the Brahmanical scheme.³⁷ The doctrine of Ahimsa has two implications. First, it completely forbade the religious men to use non-vegetarians diet since it involved the use of violence against life and militated against his spiritual progress. Secondly, it prohibited the person seeking Moksha from entering the socio-political field for the objective of undoing social tyranny by the use of force. Guru Nanak’s hymn about meat eating completely repudiates the doctrine of Ahimsa and its religious and socio-political implications.

Guru Nanak’s views on meat eating clearly show his stand on the use of force for just causes. He also gives a clear all: “Those who want to play the game of love should be willing to sacrifice their lives.”³⁸ And what he considers as unjust is clear from his following hymns: “They who have strings on their necks eat men, recite the Muhammandan Prayers; And use knives to cut men’s throats.”³⁹ In other words, he condemns both Hindu and Muslim exploiters. He says, “Riches cannot be gathered without resort to sinful means.”⁴⁰ About the rulers and the administration of his times, he says, ‘Greed and sin are the ruler and

the village accountant; falsehood is the master of the mint. Lust, his minister, summoneth and examineth men, and sitteth in judgement on them. The subjects are blind and without divine knowledge, and satisfy the judge's greed with bribes."⁴¹ "The kings are like leopards, the courtiers like dogs; For, they awaken those that sleep in God's peace. The King's servants tear (the docile subjects) with their mails; And, like curs, lick up al the blood that they spill. But hark, where men are to be judged (at the Lord's Court); Their noses will be chopped off, for God will trust them not."⁴²

In this context, Guru Hargobind, as will be seen, gave a clear enunciation of the thesis of Guru Nanak to one saint, Ram Das. He explained that Guru Nanak had prohibited greed and accumulation of wealth, but he was not against worldly life or the use of force for righteous causes and the removal of tyranny. Guru Gobind Singh made it absolutely clear that all the Gurus were one in spirit, i.e. they followed one and the same mission,^{42a} and he calls God as 'the protector of the weak' and 'the destroyer of the trants'.⁴³ His mission, he said, was to eliminate tyranny and to establish the rule of righteousness and justice.⁴⁴ The first coin struck by the Sikhs, within a year of Guru Gobind Singh's death, and those issued later, bear the inscription, 'Guru Govind had received from Nanak Deg (cauldron to feed the poor), Teg (sword) and Fateh (victory).'^{44a} The Sikh tradition, from the early period, that Guru Gobind Singh's mission was a continuation of that of Guru Nanak must have been very strong to have found pronounced expression in this manner. This is another basic departure which distinguishes the Sikhs gospel from that of the Radical Bhaktas and the traditional religions. This departure, as will be seen, had far-reaching consequences towards determining the course of the Sikh movement and its militant activities.

c) Dharam

Another important innovation made by the Sikh Guru was to put their own revolutionary content into the ancient idea of dharma. This concept has been very pliable in the orthodox Indian religious tradition. It covers a wide range of human activities, including religious, ritualistic and even minor observances of common daily

life. In principle there could be a vocational dharma for prostitutes, robbers and thieves.⁴⁵ But there was no universal ethics.” There was no sort of ‘natural law’. There was simply no ‘natural’ equality of men before any authority, least of all before a super-worldly god.” The orthodox dharma hindered that development of any sort of idea of ‘human rights’; and its main thrust was directed towards establishing and maintaining the caste order, the Varna Ashrama Dharma. The Buddhist Dharma laid emphasis on the value of moral conduct as opposed to the orthodox values based on birth and hierarchy. But, for Buddhism life was a suffering. Buddhist Dharma was clearly linked with other worldliness and Ahimsa and Buddhism was basically monastic. As such, the effect of Buddhist Dharma on the general society was just subsidiary and incidental.

But, for the Sikh Gurus, Dharm (the Punjabi equivalent of Dharma) had entirely a new meaning. The Sikh Dharm meant the creation of the Kingdom of God on earth. By all practical means a just order had to be established. Social and political inequity, including the injustice of the Varna Ashrama Dharma, had to be combated and eliminated. Power had to be captured for the poor and the down-trodden.

Guru Gobind Singh says, that his father ‘suffered martyrdom for the sake of Dharma’ and he elaborates his own mission thus:

“I assumed birth for the purpose of spreading the faith, saving the saints, and extirpating all tyrants.”⁴⁶

As will be seen, the Guru later institutionalised his ideal of defending dharma by creating the Khalsa.

e) *Devotion to Gurus*

Devotion to religious preceptors is common to all religions. It is a double-edged weapon. When harnessed to serve a noble purpose it could work wonders; otherwise, it could lead to aberrations as well. Devotion to Prophet Muhammad contributed a good deal in arousing the zeal which carried his message of human equality to far-flung counties, but it also assumed the form of religious exclusiveness and Shariatic bigotry which frustrated the fulfillment of this lofty ideal. In India,

too, the institution of Guru came to be seriously abused. But the Sikh Gurus steered clear of these dangers by impersonalising the concept of Guru, by placing principles above personalities and by diverting religious devotion to serve social and political ends. As a final step to abolish the personality cult among the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh abolished altogether the institution of a Guru in person and conferred Guruship on the Guru Granth, the enshrined principles.

One can appreciate the social contribution of this devotional approach of the Sikhs towards the

Guru only if one is aware of the Indian social context in which it was made. Pannikar writes: 'Beyond this extended joint family (i.e. the sub-caste), the Hindu in practice recognises no society or community. This is the widest social group that the Hindu evolved and is therefore the limit of his allegiance, of his social relations, of his loyalties. It is the bed-rock on which the Hindu social organisation is built.'⁴⁷

The problems of leading men to serve humanistic causes in a society, whose very basis was hierarchical, was in itself very tough to tackle. It was further compounded by the narrowing down and segmentation of social loyalties. In a country, where every human activity was conceived and postulated in religious terms, devotion to a religious head, dedicated to a progressive cause, could be the means, perhaps the only means, to raise people above their divisive values and loyalties and yoke them to achieving social goals. This is what precisely happened in the Sikh movement. Devotion towards the Sikh Gurus supplanted hierarchical values and narrow individual, caste and class loyalties. It speaks volumes about the deep commitment of the Gurus to their revolutionary mission that they delinked the devotion directed towards their personalities and channelized it towards revolutionary objectives. In the battle at Chamkaur, when most of the besieged Sikhs had died and there was no hope left of holding the mud fortress for long, the survivors forced Guru Gobind Singh to leave the place in order to reorganise the movement Sant Singh dressed himself like the Guru and remained behind in order to deceive the enemy and gain time for the Guru's escape. Finally, when overpowered, "He went on uttering 'Khalsa', 'Khalsa', and had no other desire. Sant

Singh expired with *Wahiguru* (God's name) on his lips."⁴⁸ The point we want to emphasize is that the devotion to the Guru was transformed into devotion to the revolutionary cause. The faith in Gurus, transmuted into an abiding faith in the ultimate victory of the revolutionary cause, alone sustained the movement in its prolonged armed struggle long after the Guru had passed away. Bhangu writes about the Sikh warriors and guerillas; "Naked, hungry and thirsty, they had no ammunition and had no access to place of habitation. Those who were taken ill died for want of medical aid. Their only hope was the Guru's benediction; this was their only treasure."⁴⁹ Instances of this kind are innumerable. The Sikh history is a table of sacrifice, persecutions and martyrdoms invited by the Sikhs in the service of their mission. It is for this mission the Gurus had inspired, prepared and led them.

3. The Sikh thesis and the Sikh movement.

Sikhism took a comprehensive and integrated view of religion. In its view, religion had to tackle all the challenges thrown up by the totality of life; because life could not arbitrarily be compartmentalized into religious, social and political a change not only in the character of the individual, but also in the sociopolitical environment which determined his development. It was to be a total freedom or transformation of both the man and his society. In other words, a change of the value patterns was as much necessary as the elimination of unjust social and political systems.

The Sikhs Gurus, in their, in their hymns, emphasize again and again that Hauman, ego or individualism, is the root of all human ills, and that only antidote to this human failing is to link oneself with Naam of God. This aspect of the subject does not come directly within the scope of our purview. But, we mention this so as to show how great importance the Gurus attached to raising human ego-consciousness, the fountain head of his motivations and attributes, to a higher level of consciousness, wherein Hauman ceases to afflict man. In fact, there is so much emphasis, in the Gurus' hymns, on the imperative necessity of changing the egoistic consciousness of man that many people

regard Sikhism as purely Naam-marga and miss its sociopolitical implications and the historical role played by the Gurus in furtherance thereof. The character of all social and political set-ups is determined, in the last analysis, by the motivations of the men and women who constitute that society. Therefore, the Gurus put the greatest emphasis on curbing the instincts of acquisitiveness and aggressiveness. This emphasis was not only for changing the quality of the individual alone but also for changing the character of the society, because, according to the Sikh thesis, the fate of the individual and the society are indissolubly linked with each other.

No understanding of the Sikh movement is complete unless it is appreciated that it was the product of this integrated Sikh view of religion. The Gurus followed a two-pronged line. They aimed at fashioning a God-oriented man (Gurumukh) in order to create an ideal society, and they wanted to change the society to that it could help in creating an ideal man.

The Sikh Panth was, not organized as just another sect to pursue the traditional Indian approach to religion. It was made the basis for changing the caste order, for fighting political power for a plebian mission. The organisation of the Panth and its social and political goals, which will be discussed hereafter, are all of one piece. These flow from the Sikh thesis. The Sikh cultural revolution was transformed into a militant revolutionary movement, and the latter aimed at upholding the Sikh ethical ideals. It was not easy to maintain this aim, but there was no doubt about the idea the Gurus had laid down for the Sikhs. "Who are power-less even in power and are humble and meek."⁵⁰ The Sikhs have to travel a path which is 'sharper than razor's edge and thinner than the hair.'⁵¹ (i.e. a rare combination of revolutionary acuteness and humility). The Sikh was to be a saint and soldier in one — 'a soldier saint'. The author of *Hakikat* wrote that 'In Nanak's path, in all worship humility is given the first place.'⁵²

CHAPTER X

The Sikh Panth

In view of their ideology, the Sikh Gurus could not rest content merely with preaching their doctrines and leaving it at that. Their world-view impelled them to accept the challenges which the unjust caste order and the religious and the political domination posed. To solve these problems it was imperative to organize people. Institutions like the caste system and the oppressive political state could be replaced only by creating parallel institutions. There was no alternative to taking steps in this direction. Ignoring the challenges would not have solved any of the problems, nor contributed to universal humanism. It was a very difficult mission both to build new institutions and, at the same time, to maintain the spirit of universalism in a mass organization.

Idealism has, except as a source of inspiration, limited social utility if it is not properly organised for social ends. This is amply illustrated by the negligible social impact of the Radical Bhakti ideology on the caste society. If idealism is to be yoked to achieving social aims, it has got to be institutionalised. In the process, it cannot escape assuming a certain distinctiveness and identity of its own. And greater the resistance to be over come to the social change, the greater has to be the emphasis on the separate identity and organisation of the new ideology.

1. Distinctiveness

The universal and non-sectarian gospel of Guru Nanak in itself became the first step in differentiating the Sikh mission from the older creeds. In his time, the Indian atmosphere was surcharged with hatred between Hindus and Muslims. They were

further torn by extreme sectarian rivalry within their own ranks. Religious votaries were pigeon-holed into sect or the other. It was not common to rise above narrow sectarian considerations. It was in this milieu that Guru Nanak declared that he was neither a Hindu nor a Mussalman. To pointed questions at different places, he replied, 'I am neither a Hindu, nor a Mussalman. I accept neither the Ved, nor the Koran.'¹ 'If I say I am a Hindu, I am lost altogether; at the same time I am not a Mussalman.'² He advised the Yogis to rise above sectarianism and regard the whole humanity as their own.³ Besides his numerous hymns, there is the evidence of the Janamsakhis that the contemporaries of Guru Nanak were impressed by his universal humanitarian approach. When he visited the tomb of Sheikh Bahaud-Din Zakria in Multan, the Muslim priest observed, "We know you do not discriminate between Hindus and Muslims."⁴ Guru Nanak advised a Muslim saint named Wali Kandhari not to differentiate between Sunnis and Rafzies, because all the sects belonged to God.⁵ The Pathan Ubare Khan recognized that the Guru was above Hindu or Muslim sectarianism.⁶ When Guru Nanak settled at Kartarpur, both Hindus and Muslims used to visit him.^{6a} Bhai Gurdas, a near contemporary of Guru Nanak wrote: 'Hindus and Muslims, forsaking their sectarianism, began to worship Baba (Guru Nanak).'7 Coming under the influence of Guru Nanak, 'Hindus and Muslims shed of their sectarianism.' At his death, Hindus and Muslims both claimed the right to perform his last rites.⁸ His image in mass mind is reflected by the popular saying: 'Nanak Shah faqir is Guru to Hindus and Pir to the Muslims.'

Although the universalism of Guru Nanak lent its own distinctiveness to his message, the real reason which made this differentiation deep and lasting was that his gospel cut at the roots of some of the most cherished faiths of both the Hindus and the Mussalmans. The Guru repudiated all claims to exclusive religious authority by any prophet or scripture. The Sikhs Gurus accepted not authority other than that of God. "God being ineffable, Brahma and Vishnu have not His limits;... He made millions of Indars and Bawans; He created and destroyed Brahmas and Shivas."⁹ Secondly, "In his court, there are hundreds of thousands of Muhammads, Brahmas, Bishnu

(Vishnu) and Mahesh (Shivas).”⁹ “Secondly, “In His court, there are hundreds of thousands of Muhammads, Brahmas, Bishnu (Vishnus) and Muhesh (Sivas).”¹⁰ As regard scriptures, Guru Nanak says; “” The drum of Veds resoundeth for many a faction. Remember Gds’ name, Nanak, there is none but Him.”¹¹ We have it on the authority of Dabistan that the Sikhs ‘do not read the Mantras (i.e. the Vedic or other scriptural hymns) of the Hindus, they do not venerate their temples f idols, nor do they esteem their Avtars. They have no regard for the Sanskrit language which, according to the Hindus, is the speech of the angles.’^{11a} It has been that the demand for exclusive allegiance to religious source-heads was one of the major causes of cleavage between the Hindus ad the Mohammandans. The gospel of the Sikh Gurus struck at this foundation on which the super-structure of the then existing religious sectarianism had been raised.

The grounds for the differentiation of Guru’s message from that of the caste ideology an the case society were far more basis. The caste ideology was the anti-thesis of humanism, and the caste society was extremely parochial in its outlook. To belong to it, it was necessary to be born within it. The land where the Varna Ashrama Dharma was not established was regarded impure;¹² and the Aryavarta, the pure land, was at one period circumscribed within the limits of the river Sindh in the north and the river Carmanvati in the south.¹³ The Sikh Gurus rejected almost all the cardinal beliefs of the caste society. They repudiated the authority of the Vedas and allied scriptures, discarded the theory of Avtarhood, disowned all its sectarian goals goddesses and Avtaras, and condemned idol worship, formalism, ritualism, and ceremonialism.

The ideology of the Sikh Gurus, thus, stood differentiated by its own logic. Its universality and humanism were compatible neither with Muslim exclusiveness, nor with the caste-ridden and sectarian orthodox society.

2. Separate Identity

Mere ideological distinctiveness was not enough. The greatest social hurdle in the way of humanism was the inequitous caste system. It could not be reformed from within. For, social inequality and hierarchism were in-built in its very constitution and mechanism. The anti-caste movements could survive only if these

divorced themselves from the caste society. Buddhism organized a monastic society outside the caste ranks. But, it left its laity to remain in the caste fold. The result was that, when Brahmanism reasserted itself, the lay followers of Buddhism imperceptibly moved into their caste moorings, leaving the order of monks, high and dry, in its isolation. Kabir was far more vocal than the Basawa, but the Lingayats established a far more separate identity than the Kabir-panthies; because their deviations (e.g. widow-remarriage, burying the dead and admission of all castes) from the caste usages were very radical. Later, the lingayats tried to tone down their radicalism. But, in spite of this, they are perhaps, more an appendage of the orthodox society than its integral part; because even the toned down Lingayatism is not wholly adjustable in the caste order.¹⁴ Chaitanya, who was more radical with regard to caste restrictions than the Maharashtra Bhaktas, had both low caste Hindus and Mussalmans as his disciples. In the Kartabha sect, which branched out of the Chaitanya school, there is no distinction between Hindus, Mussalmans and Christians. A Mussalman has more than once risen to the rank of a teacher. The members of the sect eat together once or twice in a year.¹⁵ But, the main body of the followers of Chaitanya reverted to the caste society; and even its Kartabhai section, like the Lingayats, does not assert a distinct entity apart from the caste society. The creed of Kabir attained the stage of only a Mata (religious path), although of all the denouncers of caste considerations he was the most unequivocal and vocal. The Kabir-panth remained a loose combination of those who were attracted by Kabir's religious appeal, or were attracted by some other considerations (e.g. Julahas (weavers), who constituted a majority of the Kabir panthies, were attracted to Kabir because he was a Julaha).¹⁶

These instances leave no doubt that anti-caste movements, like those of Kabir and other Bhaktas, whose departure from the caste ideology had been confined only to the ideological plane, remained still-born in the field of social achievement. And, those like the Lingayats and the followers of Chaitanya, who, under the influence of a teacher, did adopt certain anti-caste usages, but either they did not want to break completely from the caste society or did not pursue their aim consistently enough, remained tagged to the caste order in one

form or the other. The Buddhist monks alone could escape being swallowed by the caste society, because they had made a complete break with the caste order both ideologically and organisationally. Accordingly, in the medieval period, the chances of success of any anti movement were in direct proportion to the separate identity it established outside the caste society both at the ideological and the organisational levels. And the foremost prerequisite for this purpose was a clear perception of this aim, a determined will and a consistent effort to pursue it.

The separate identity of the Sikh Panth and the Sikh Movement is such a patent fact of history that it is hardly questioned. This by itself is a clear indication of the fact that the Sikh Gurus had a definite aim of giving their message a distinct and new organizational form. Otherwise, it is hard to explain why the Sikh movement should not have met the same fate as that of Lingayats and the followers of Kabir and Chaitanya. The Sikh Gurus realized, which the others did not, that, in order to give battle to the caste order, it was imperative to build a social system and organise people outside the caste-society. This process of establishing a separate society (the Sikh Panth) started with Guru Nanak himself.

Guru Nanak began his career as a teacher of men with the significant utterance that 'there is no Hindu and no Mussalman'. The Guru thereby wanted to emphasise the eternal unity and brotherhood of man. For the Guru everybody was primarily a man and not a Hindu or a Mussalman. The same Janamsakhi, which gives the above story proceeds to say: 'Then Guru Baba Nanak gave all his earthly belongings and went to join the company of faqirs (i.e. Muslim recluses)... Then people asked him, "Nanak, earlier you were something else i.e. Hindu, now you have become different. There is the one path of the Hindus, and the other that of Mussalmans; which path do you follow?" Then Guru Baba Nanak said, "There is no Hindu, no Mussalman; which of these paths can I follow? I follow God's path. God is neither Hindu nor Mussalman. I follow God's right path."¹⁷

Guru Nanak's reply clearly indicates his complete break with his Hindu past. Guru Nanak clarified unambiguously that he was rejecting both the Hindu and the Muslim paths and instead

was following God's right path because God was neither Hindu nor Mussalman. In other words, the Guru rejects the Hindus and the Muslim paths, not because of the shortcomings of their followers, but mainly because God is non-sectarian.

We have seen that the Radical Bhaktas were not Hindu reformers. If all that they rejected is taken out of Brahmanism, there is nothing of substance left that the orthodox religion could claim as exclusively its own. This applies doubly to Guru Nanak's ideology, because he was even more vehement in his criticism of Brahmanism and its scriptures and practices.

The Janamsakhis also make it clear that Guru Nanak's mission was non-sectarian and in the context of the times a new path. 'God sent (Nanak) to start a panth (religion).¹⁸ 'Nobody could make out whether he was a Hindu or a Muslim'.¹⁹ Two Kazis who came to see him came to the conclusion that he was the Pir of both Hindus and Muslims. 'You carry conviction with (both) Hindus and Muslims'.²⁰ 'Then it became a current topic of discussion among Hindus and Muslims.... What is his religion? He does not follow any one of the panths of Yogis, Sanyasis, Tapasyis, Kazis, Mullahs, Hindus, Muslims, Veds and Katebs...'²¹ A Hindu Khatri complained to the Delhi Sultan that 'he does not recognise the authority of either Ved or Kateb'.²² He went to preach his message in Muslim countries and was warned of the hazards to his life for doing so. If he had been a mere Hindu reformer or a sectarian, there was no point in his going to far off lands, because no Hindu could ever contemplate of converting Muslims to Hinduism. In addition, we have the evidence of Bhai Gurdas who wrote ; '(Guru Nanak) vanquished the Sidha in discussion and made a separate Panth of his own.'²³ 'Opening the book, (they) asked who is better, Hindu or Mussalman?'²⁴ ('Guru Nanak replied) They (Hindus and Mussalmans) quarrel with each other, (but) Ram and Rahim are no the same footing.'²⁵ 'Nanak struck his own coin in this world and created a pure panth.'²⁶

Further, Guru Nanak took clear organisational steps in shaping a Sikh society on separate ideological lines. He established Dharmsalas in far-flung places inside the country and outside it.²⁷ These Dharmsalas became the centres where his followers could meet together, practise the Dharm of his concept, and spread his

message to others. In addition, he appointed select persons (Manjis) for the purpose of furthering his mission.²⁸ In his life-time, his followers came to be known as Nanak-panthies, and they had their own separate way of saluting each other (Sat Kartar).²⁹

The greatest single organisational step that Guru Nanak took was to select, by a system of tests, a worthy successor to lead and continue his mission. He was named Angad, i.e. a limb of Guru Nanak himself. It is recorded in the Guru Granth that the change-over from Nanak to his successors meant only a change of bodily forms, otherwise the same light shown in them and they followed the same course.³⁰ Bhai Gurdas also writes that Guru Nanak established a pure Panth, blended his light with that of Angad and nominated him in his place as the Guru of that Panth.³¹ Guru Nanak directed his successor Guru Angad not to remain absorbed wholly in meditation but to devote his time to the shaping of the Panth.³² The same instructions were passed on by Angad to his successor Amar Das,³³ and this mission was continued by the later Gurus.³⁴ The evidence is of great value because it embodies an altogether new tradition. This could be true only of the Sikh Gurus, because nowhere else in the Indian religious tradition social objectives were given preference over spiritual bliss.

Guru Nanak had started the institution of Dharamsala (religious centres), Sangat (congregations of his followers), Langar (common kitchen) and Manjis (seats of preaching). The succeeding Gurus further consolidated and extended these institutions. Guru Amar Das systematised this institution of Manjis and created twenty-two centres for the extension of the mission. Persons of high religious calibre were nominated to these offices. They were in charge of the Guru's followers in an area and catered to their religious as well as secular needs. They were the links of the organisation and the two-way channels of communication between the Guru and the Sangat. They collected the offerings and passed the same on to the central treasury where these were used by the Guru for the purposes of the mission. Guru Arjan regularised the collection of these contributions. He fixed that every Sikh should set apart one tenth of his income for the common cause.

When Guru Nanak settled at Kartarpur after completing his missionary tours, the place became the central Dharamsala, the focal meeting place for his followers. Guru Amar Das made Govindwal the centre of his mission. He fixed two occasions when the Guru's followers would come from far and near for general meetings of the panth. Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan extended these centres to Tarn Taran and Amritsar. In the course of time, the latter place became to the Sikhs what Mecca is to the Muslims.

In addition to the consolidation of these institutions initiated by Guru Nanak, Guru Angad invented the Gurmukhi script and Guru Arjan compiled the Sikh scripture. These two steps went a long way in establishing the separate identity of the Sikhs. With a distinct organisation, separate religious centres, a separate script and a scripture of their own, they became an entirely separate church and a new society. It is not to our purpose to go into the details of the organizational steps taken by the Gurus, but it may be mentioned that the militarisation of the movement, as will be seen, only added a new dimension to this development. Even before this militarisation, the Sikh movement had established a firm and a separate organizational identity known as the Sikh Panth.

2. Identity and Universality

While repudiating claims of others to exclusive religious authority, the Sikh Gurus did not advance any such claim on their own behalf. Guru Nanak calls himself 'lowest of the low.'³⁵ Guru Ram Das describes himself to be the meanest of the whole creation³⁶ and Guru Gobind Singh regards himself as 'the slave of the Supreme Being.'³⁷ Of the ten Sikh Gurus, the hymns of seven have been recorded. In not a single hymn do they indicate any claim to exclusive religious authority. It was Guru Gobind Singh, the creator of the brotherhood of the Khshlas — a body devoted to the service of humanity — who specifically made clear that the Hindu temple and the mosque, are the same; and the whole humanity was to be regarded as one.³⁸

The Single greatest step that the Sikh Gurus took to prevent religious authority becoming the source of sectarianism was to detach ideology from the person of the ideologue. It was the eternal

spirit, the doctrine, the tenet, or the principle, which was made supreme over and above the person of the teacher, the Guru or the prophet. When Guru Nanak nominated Angad as his successor, he (Nanak) laid his head at the feet of Angad as a mark of homage.³⁹ It is significant that Guru Nanak did not bow before Lehna (i.e. disciple who was not yet perfect), but bowed before Angad, the person who had then become the head and represented the spirit of the mission. As soon as the same spirit was enshrined in both, the distinction between the Guru and the disciple was obliterated. Satta and Balwand, in their hymns recorded in the Guru Granth, and Bhai Gurdas, have made this point absolutely clear, "The light was the same, the system was the same, the only change was a change of bodies."⁴⁰ "Nanak blended his light with his (Angad's light), (and in this way) the Satguru Nanak transformed his form."⁴¹ Not only the distinction between one Guru and the other Guru disappeared, but the distinction between the guru and all those Sikhs who had imbibed in toto the Guru's spirit also disappeared. Guru Hargobind touched the feet of Bhai Buddha to pay him homage.⁴² And by conferring Guruship on the Guru Granth, Guru Gobind Singh emphasised two points. First, that the Guruship was not embodied in any person but in the principle and the spirit he enshrined; and secondly, that it was the ideology that mattered and not its source. Because, the hymns of the Bhakti saints incorporated in the Guru Granth were to be as sacred to the Sikhs as the hymns of the Sikh Gurus themselves.

The Sikh tradition is replete with instances showing the cosmopolitan spirit of the Sikh Gurus. "The Hindus reject Muslims and the Muslims reject the Hindus. God has ordained me (Nanak) to act upon the four Kates. The merit does not lie in reading or hearing them, but lies in living them in life."⁴³ Guru Amardas sent Prema to a Muslim saint for getting cured,⁴⁴ and made Alayar, a Muslim, one of his priests, who drew no distinction between Hindus and Muhammandans.⁴⁵ Guru Arjan incorporated in the Guru Granth and hymns of two Muslim saints, Faried and Bhikan, thus giving them equal status with the hymns of the Gurus. He got the foundation stone of the premier Sikh temple laid by the famous Sufi Saint, Mian Mir. Guru Hargobind, who was the first to raised and standard of

armed revolt against the Mughals and fought six battles against them, built, on his own, a mosque when he founded the new township of Hargobindpur.⁴⁶ It was Guru Gobind Singh who created the Khalsa to wage a relentless struggle against the religious and political tyranny of the Mughal empire, but his hymns leave no doubt about his cosmopolitan approach: “What is a Hindu or Muslim to him, from whose heart doubt departeth.”^{46a} At a period when Muslim sentiment against the Sikhs had crystallised, many a noble spirit among the Muslims recognized the non-sectarian character of the Guru’s mission. Buddan Shah was a known Muslim divine. He himself, his brother, his four sons and seven hundred disciples fought for the Guru. During the struggle, two of his sons died fighting,⁴⁷ and he himself was tortured to death by Osman Khan for having sided with Guru.^{47a} Saiyed Beg, one of Aurangzeb’s generals, who was in command of five thousand men, changed his mind at a critical moment in the course of the battle and ‘threw in his lot with the Sikhs, and contributed all his wealth towards their struggle against the Muhammadans...’⁴⁸ Later, Saiyed Beg died fighting for the Guru in another action.⁴⁹ Another general, Saiyed Khan, sent imperial forces and voluntarily submitted himself to the Guru.⁵⁰ By far the best instance of the cosmopolitan spirit of the movement in the story of Kanahiya who, during the critical battle at Anandpur, used to offer water and assistance with absolute impartiality to the wounded both among the Sikhs and the enemy forces. When questioned, Kanahiya, quoted the Guru’s own instructions that one should look on all men with an equal eye. The Guru complimented him for displaying the true spirit of a Sikh.⁵¹ The author of *Hakikat* attested to it in 1783 (i.e. after the Sikhs had passed through the severest persecution at the hands of the Muslim rulers) that, ‘In his (Nanak’s) religion there is very little prejudice against any nation.’^{51a}

It is important to understand that this cosmopolitan Sikh tradition could not be born either out of Muslim exclusiveness, or the caste ideology. Only the Radical Bhaktas shared this outlook, but they never ventured in the social or organizational field. The *Bhaktamala*, the only earlier record of their lives, does not mention

the shaping of any such tradition. Therefore, the very existence and persistence of this tradition is a strong indication of the universal character of the Sikh movement.

The really important point to be noted is that for the practice of their universal humanism, the Sikh Gurus established the forum of the Sikh Panth. Their universalism had distinct social aims. This was their major difference with the Radical Bhaktas who never tried to institutionalize their ideology. The Sikh Gurus were deeply committed to achieving practical social good. It was the inner compulsion both of their religion and universalism that prompted them to create a new path and a panth so as to give practical shape to a programme that directly militated, on the one hand, against the caste ideology and, on the other, against the Shariat of the ruling Islam in India. Just as in the case of the doctrine of Ahimsa, they did not make a fetish of universalism so as to allow it to be used as a cover for inaction and for ignoring their avowed social goals. The Gurus never wanted the Hindus to remain as Hindus in a manner which left the caste system and its anti-humanism intact. Similarly, they did not want the Muslims to remain as Muslims in a manner which led to Shariatic exclusiveness and, its corollary, the religious dictation of non-Muslims. All that Guru Nanak wanted was that Hindus should be Hindus of his concept, and the Muslims to be Muslims of his concept. His hymns leave no doubt on this issue. For these clearly commend the acceptance of values and virtues instead of the formalism and ritualism of the old religions. "Make kindness thy mosque, sincerity thy prayer carpet; What is just and lawful thy Quran. Modesty thy circumcision; civility thy fasting; so shall thou be a Musalman."⁵² "A Musalman is he who cleaneth his impurity."⁵³ "(A Muslim(dwells on the Shariat. But, they alone are perfect who surrender their self to see God."⁵⁴ "He who instructeth all the four castes in the Lord's wisdom, Nanak, such a Pandit I salute for ever."⁵⁵ "Yoga is neither in the patched coat, nor in the Yogi's staff, nor in besmearing oneself with ashes... If one looketh upon all the creation alike, he is acclaimed as a true Yogi."⁵⁶ This meant pure and simple humanism and the abolition of all those institutions which were unjust or aggressive. The creation of parallel institutions to replace the anti-humanistic ones, e.g. the

caste society and the tyrannical state, was an indispensable prerequisite. It was for this purpose that the Sikh Gurus organized the Sikh Panth. But, they scrupulously maintained the spirit of humanism and universality in that organization. The universalism of the Sikh Gurus was not of that hue which is self-satisfied in remaining in an amorphous state and does not aspire to institutionalize for a humanitarian purpose. At the same time, the Sikh Panth was not created just to add another sect. It was established to serve an egalitarian cause.

CHAPTER XI

Egalitarian Society

The character and development of the Sikh movement reveals that it had three main social goals: (1) to build up an egalitarian society, (2) to use this new society as a base to wage an armed struggle against religious and political oppression, and (3) to capture political power by the Khalsa. All these aims were integral parts of the Sikh thesis that injustice, inequality and hierarchism, in whatsoever form, must be combated. In this chapter we shall deal with the first goal.

1. The Caste

The caste system was the greatest obstacle in the way of the Sikh movement for developing an egalitarian society. Though the Sikh Gurus had no soft corner for the lesser variations of social inequities, they felt that, unless the fundamental menace of the caste was eliminated, there could be no major change in the other inequities. We shall, therefore, concentrate on the egalitarian social aspect of the movement mainly in its relevancy to the caste. It is important that the struggle of the Sikh movement against the caste should be judged in the context of its observance in the medieval era, and not under the present day conditions when it is losing its old hold and sting.

The Radical Bhaktas denounced the pillars on which the super structure of the caste system rested. The Sikh Gurus did this even more unequivocally. To avoid repetition, we shall deal with only the broad aspects of the caste and the practical steps taken by the Sikh movement to combat this evil.

a) *Motivating Power*

The motivation which sustains a social system is more important than the means employed to achieve its objectives. Consequently, a movement which aims at abolishing a social system, has, while not losing sight of the means, to concentrate on subverting the motivating power of the old system. To weaken the values on which a social system stands is to weaken the foundations of a system are more important than its features. Unless this is kept in view, one is likely to lose the right perspective in assessing the strength of any attack on the caste system.

The directive force underlying the Indian social and religious development was, on the whole, the preservation of the caste order. The motivating power behind the caste system was the upholding of the caste status of the Brahmins and the high castes. This is the key to the understanding of the caste system, and, consequently, to the appreciation of the anti-caste movements. Restrictions on connubium, commensalism and occupations on castes, and the ritual barriers between them, were all contributory means for achieving the main aim of maintaining the caste-status.

b) *Caste-status*

The caste was essentially a social rank, but it gave social status a new content by giving it a religious and ritualistic significance. 'The ties of caste', writes Sherring, 'are stronger than those of religion... With many Hindus the highest form of religious observance is the complete fulfilment of the claims of caste; and most of them conceive of sin as a breach of castes discipline rather than of moral law.'¹ Markandeya Purana lays down that perfection can only be attained by the man who does not deviate from the duties of caste.² That is why we have termed social rank of the caste order as 'caste-status' in order to distinguish it from social rank in class societies. Social phenomenon cannot be explained in absolute terms, especially when forces opposed to each other are simultaneously at work. But, by and large, caste-status was given preference over economic and political considerations. When a king and a Brahmin pass along the same road, the road belongs to the Brahmin and

not to the king.^{2a} Between a hundred year old Kshatriya and a ten year old Brahmin, the latter is said to be like father.^{2b} The king must show himself first in the morning to the Brahmins and salute them.^{2c} “The visas (clans) bow spontaneously to the chief (rajan), who is preceded by a Brahmin.”³ The poorest Brahmin was superior in caste rank to the wealthiest Bania. The arca (respect) due to a Brahmin, or atleast the Brahmin’s claim to respect, was higher than a King’s⁴ Legitimation of political power was powerful lever in the hands of the Brahmins, because political upstarts hankered after the legitimation of their status in the caste hierarchy. This legitimation secured for the dominant political castes a superiority over their subjects ‘with an efficiency unsurpassed by any other religion’.⁵ This is how the barbarian warrior castes and the Rajputs accepted Brahmanical superiority. One of the reasons why Buddhism was vanquished was that it failed to provide such a legitimation to the ruling classes. It is not for nothing that the Maratha leader Shivaji went about abegging, even when Hindu power was at a low ebb, for the legitimation of his caste rank.

c) Status-consciousness, Caste and the Sikh movement

Sikhism is opposed to status consciousness in all its forms, because it regards ‘I’ consciousness (ego) as the greatest hurdle in the way of man’s moral and spiritual progress:

“He, alone is supreme among beings,
Whose ego goeth in the society of the Holy.
He, who thinks himself to be the lowest of the lowly,
Yea, he alone is the highest of the high.
He, whose mind is the dust of all,
O, he alone worshipeth the Lord in his heart.”⁶

The Indian orthodox religious tradition, too, has emphasized the need for eliminating ego (Ahankara); but, at the same time, it saw no contradiction in sanctifying the caste system (Varna Ashrama Dharma), which involves inequity and hierarchism. In order to reconcile this contradiction, the orthodox tradition compartmentalised ethics by setting different standards in ethical behaviour for the individual and the society. There is no such

dichotomy in Sikhism. In Sikhism, social and individual problems cannot be divorced from each other. Both have to be tackled together by a single religious approach. Sikhism did not content itself by merely attacking status consciousness in general terms. It condemned it in its direct relationship to the caste. It unequivocally declares: "O foolish man, don't take pride in caste-status; this pride leads to many an evil."⁷ "Religion consisteth not in mere words; he who looks upon all men as equals, is religious."⁸ Some of the Radical Bhaktas also subscribed in theory to the same thesis. They condemned the divisive values of the caste system. But, it is the Sikh movement alone which, impelled by its integrated religious approach to life, proceeded to make its thesis a social reality. The condemnation of status consciousness has been related to the undoing of the caste and the building of a casteless egalitarian society.

Guru Nanak attacked the caste ideology and called it perverse. "According to the Hindus, foul is the ablution of the Chandal, and vain are his religious ceremonies and decorations. False is the wisdom of the perverse; they acts produce strife. In the impure man is pride; he obtaineth not the favour of the Lord."⁹ Further, he aligned himself with the lowliest of the low castes. "There are lower castes among the low castes and some absolutely low. Nanak seeketh their company. What hath he to do with the high ones? For, where the lowly are cared for, there is thine (God's) Benediction and Grace."¹⁰

Bhai Gurdas was born twelve years after Guru Nanak's death. He joined the Sikh mission at a very early age. When Guru Amardas established twenty-two Manjis or dioceses, he was put in charge of the dioceses of Agra. Guru Arjan entrusted Bhai Gurdas with the duty of writing the Guru Granth at his (Guru's) dictation. On the death of Bhai Buddha, he was appointed as the head priest of the premier Sikh temple, Hari Mandir. Therefore, the writings of Bhai Gurdas are equally valuable and an authentic source of the Sikh tradition. He writes that Guru Nanak "made the Dharma perfect by blending the four castes into one. To treat the king and the pauper on equal footing, and while greeting to touch the feet of the other (i.e. to regard oneself humble as compared to others), was made the rule of conduct."¹¹ These lines unambiguously record, in the context of the

times, a major achievement of Guru Nanak. He did away with not only caste-status consciousness but also with the status-consciousness gap between the rich and the poor. For, far from observing untouchability, everyone actually touched the feet of everyone else while greeting him. The language used by Bhai Gurdas makes it clear that he was not repeating a precept enunciated by the Guru in his hymns, but a precept practised by his followers. Again, "The four castes were made into one, and castes (Varn) and out-caste (Avarn) regarded as noble;... The twelve sects were obliterated and the noble glorious Panth (created)."¹² Here the abolition of caste and sects is linked with the creation of the Sikh Panth. In order to emphasise its significance, Bhai Gurdas repeatedly mentions this achievement. For the same idea is conveyed at other places too.¹³ His stress is doubly evident, for he contrasts this achievement with the then prevailing social milieu in which, he felt, the society (Jagat) had been vitiated by the creation of the caste system (Varn Ashram).¹⁴ All this shows that from the very start, one of Guru Nanak's social goals was to establish the Sikh Panth with a view to creating an egalitarian society.

The Janamsakhis also corroborate the above view. The very first and the constant companion of Guru Nanak during his missionary tours was Mardana. He was doubly unacceptable to the caste society, because he was a Muslim and of a very low caste (Mirasi). "Mardana told Guru Nanak that by his (the Guru's) grace, his (Mardana's) ego had disappeared and that the four castes were due to that ego." On a missionary tour in the North, one of the Guru's companions was a calico-printer (Chimba) and another a black-smith (Lohar).¹⁵ Both of these Sudra castes are rated quite low in the caste hierarchy. Again, Guru Nanak accepted the invitation of a poor and low caste Lalo and spurned that of the rich landlord, Malik Bhago.¹⁶ All through his life, people of all castes, including Sudras and Muslims, would unhesitatingly come to him for solace.¹⁷ He told Salis Ray that this salvation lay in prostrating before his own slave.¹⁸ When questioned as to his caste, he said he was without caste (Ajati), or that his caste was as that of God (Nirankari).¹⁹ At another place, he identified himself with the weavers.²⁰ He appointed

Jhanda, a carpenter, as his deputy to spread his mission.²¹

The second Guru holds the Vedas directly responsible for initiating the myth of high and low castes and thus misleading the people. “The Vedas have given currency to the myths that make men reflect upon (Human values of) good and evil... The sense of high and low, and of caste and colour; such are the illusions created in men...”²² There was no place in his congregation for any one who observed caste.²³ All the castes were treated as equals.²⁴ Only those who were not afraid of Vedic and caste injunctions came to his congregation; others did not.²⁵ At the Langar (free kitchen) all sat at the same platform and took the same food.²⁶ The third Guru Amar Das went a step further. No one who had not partaken of food at his Langar could see him.²⁷ In his langar, “there were no distinctions of caste. Lines of noble Gurbhais (disciples of the same Guru) partook of food sitting together at the same place.”²⁸ The Hindus complained to Emperor Akbar that the Guru had abolished the distinction among the four castes. ‘He seateth all his followers in a line and causeth them to eat together from his kitchen, irrespective of caste whether they are Jats, minstrels, Muhammadans, Brahmins, Khatries, shop-keepers, sweepers, barbers, washermen, fishermen, or carpenters.’²⁹ The Hindu governor of Kasur refused Guru Amardas the facility of pitching his tent in the governor’s garden, saying : “He hath attached to him men of all castes, high and low. They sit in a line and eat with him and with one another. If he chooses to be a Guru of outcastes, he can please himself, but I will not allow him to approach my dwelling.”³⁰ Guru Arjan told Sandhu (Budhu), the potter, that it was Guru Nanak who had introduced common commensality among the four castes.³¹ Guru Hargobind ‘joined the four castes to make them one.’³² He put one cobbler (Chamar) in charge of a memorial-shrine (Damdama) he built.³³ The same Guru told Bhai Bidhia that Rup Chand (who had come from the carpenter caste) was very dear to him:

“He should be seated at a high pedestal, so that men and women should show reverence to him... He held his (Rup Chand’s) arm and seated him there;

The Guru anointed him with his own hands.”³⁴

Guru Gobind Singh chose five Beloved ones (Panj Piaras) as the leaders of the Khalsa community. Of them one was a jat, one a barber, one a calico-printer and one a water-carrier.³⁵ The three last were Sudra, the Jat being on the borderline of Vaisyas and Sudras. At the time of the baptism (Amrit) ceremony, the Guru enjoined on all who had joined the Khalsa that they should consider their previous castes erased and deem themselves all brothers i.e. of one family.³⁶ The newswriter of the period sent the Emperor a copy of the Guru's address to his Sikhs on that occasion. It is dated the first of Baisakhi 1756 (A.D. 1699), and runs as follows: 'Let all embrace one creed and obliterate differences of religion. Let the four Hindu castes who have different rules for their guidance abandon them all, adopt the one form of adoration and become brothers. Let no one deem himself superior to others... Let men of the four castes receive my baptism, eat out of one dish, and feel no disgust or contempt for one another.'³⁷ These may or may not be the exact words of the Guru's address, but their substance is corroborated by the near-contemporary Koer Singh. He records that the Guru said: 'Many a Vaish (Vaishya), Sudar (Shudra) and Jat have I incorporated in the Panth,'³⁸ Again, he writes that the Guru 'has made the four castes into a single one, and made the Sudra, Vaish, Khatri and Brahmin take meals at the same place'.³⁹ In the later literature, too, it has been recorded that the Guru's mission was to weld the four castes into one. 'Any one of the four castes who takes baptism assumed my (the Guru's) form'.⁴⁰

All the members of the Khalsa Dal, who were drawn from all castes including the Rangretas, dined together.⁴¹ One of the leading warriors in the battle of Chamkaur was Jiwan Singh, Rangreta.⁴² The supreme commander of the Sikh Panth, who succeeded Nawab Kapur Singh and who later struck coin in the name of the Sikh Panth at Lahore, was Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. He had been converted from the distiller caste (Kalal), a low caste despised for the land as a confederacy, one of its twelve units was headed by Jassa Singh Ramgharia, a carpenter. Another derived from

the same caste, Sukha Singh, was the leader of the Khalsa in that great battle called Chota Ghalu Ghara.

d) The spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization

In assessing the anti-caste stance of the Sikh movement, what is even more important is the spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization that pervaded it during the Khalsa period, because, more than the form, it is the spirit which reflects the character of a movement.

The idea of equality was inherent in the system of the Gurus and the Sikh movement so long it retained its pristine purity. After he had anointed Angad as his successor, Guru Nanak bowed at his feet in salutation. The same custom was followed by the later Gurus.⁴³ The Sikhs, who had imbibed the spirit of the Gurus, were regarded as equals of the Guru. The collective wisdom of the congregation of Sikhs was of higher value than that of the Guru alone (Guru weeh visve, sangat iki visve). Bhai Gurdas repeatedly makes it clear that there was no status gap between the Guru and a Sikh (Gur chela, chela Guru).⁴⁴ Guru Angad was very much displeased with the minstrels (Rabibis) who refused to comply with a request from Bhai Buddha. The Guru said : 'Regard the Guru's Sikh as myself; have no doubt about this'.⁴⁵ Guru Hargobind, out of reverence for Bhai Buddha, a devout Sikh, touched his feet.⁴⁶ He told Bhai Bidhichand that there was no difference between him and the Guru.⁴⁷ The same Guru reprimanded the members of his own family for not sharing sweets with his Sikhs, who, he said 'were dearer to him than his life'.⁴⁸ The Sikhs addressed each other as 'brother' (Bhai), thus showing a perfect level of equality among them. In all the available letters written by the Gurus the Sikhs have been addressed as brothers (Bhai).⁴⁹ It was in continuation of this tradition that Guru Gobind Singh requested with clasped hands the Beloved ones to baptise him.⁵⁰ This shows that he regarded them not only as his equal but made them as his Guru. This was the utmost limit to which a religious head could conceive of or practise human equality.

The spirit of brotherhood and fraternization is even more difficult to inculcate than the spirit of equality. This new spirit was a natural

sequence of the Sikh doctrines and approach. What is important is the emphasis laid on this spirit of brotherhood and fraternization in the Sikh literature, and more particularly the extent to which it was practised by the Sikh movement.

As there was no difference between the Guru and the Sikh; the devotion to the Guru was easily channelized into the service of the Sikhs. 'God-oriented service is the service of the Guru's Sikhs, who should be regarded as one's dearest kith and kin'⁵¹ 'The Guru's Sikhs should serve the other Sikhs.'⁵² The (sixth) Guru said: "The Sikhs are dearer to me than life."⁵³ One of Guru Gobind Singh's own hymns is: "To serve them pleaseth my heart; no other service is dear to my soul.

.....

All the wealth of my house with my soul and body is for them."⁵⁴

The codes of Sikh conduct (Rehatnamas) continue to record this tradition. 'He who shirks a poor man is an absolute defaulter.'⁵⁵ 'Serve a Sikh and a pauper'.⁵⁶ 'If some among a group of Sikhs sleep on cots and the poor Sikhs sleep on the floor and are not shown due courtesy, the former Sikhs are at fault.'⁵⁷ 'The essence of Sikhism is service, love and devotion... (The Sikh) should be regarded as the image of the Guru and served as such.'⁵⁸

Bhalla records that these precepts were actually followed in the Sikh panth. 'The Sikhs served each other, regarding every Sikh as the Guru's image.'⁵⁹ Bhangu writes: 'No body bore malice to any one; the Singhs (Sikhs who had been baptized) vied with each other in rendering service to others.'⁶⁰ 'If any Sikh got or brought any eatable, it was never used alone, it was partaken by all the Sikhs. Nothing was hidden from the other Sikhs. All eatable were shared by all members of the Khalsa; if there was nothing to eat, they would say 'The Langar is in trance (Masat)'. 'One would offer food to others first and then eat oneself. Singhs would be addressed with great love.'⁶¹ Guru's Sikh was the brother of each Sikh.'⁶² During the days of struggle with the Mughals, one Niranjania reported to the Mughal governor against the

Sikhs: ‘They would themselves go hungry and naked, but would not bear the misery of the Singhs; they themselves would ward off cold by sitting near fire, but would send clothes to the Singhs; they would grind corn with their own hands and send it to the Singhs; they would twist ropes and send its proceeds to the Singhs. They, who for their living would go to far off places, send their earnings to the Singhs.’⁶³ ‘All members of the Khalsa Dal ‘were issued clothes from a common store. Without concealing anything, they would pool all their earnings at one place. If any one found or brought any valuable, these were deposited in the treasury as common property.’⁶⁴

The prevalence of this spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization among the Sikhs is confirmed by evidence from the non-Sikh sources. Ghulam mohyy-ud-Din, the author of *Fatuhat Namah-I-Samadi* (1722-23), was a contemporary of Banda. He writes that low-caste Hindus, termed *Khas-o-Khashak-I-hamid-I-jahanmi wajud* (i.e. the dregs of the society of the hellish Hindus) swelled the ranks of Banda, and everyone in his army ‘would address the other as the adopted son of the oppressed Guru (Guru Gobind Singh) and would publicise themselves with the title of *sahibzada* (“*Yaki ra b targhib-I-digran pisar-I-khanda-I-guru-I-maqhur gufta b laqub-I-shahzadgi mashur kardah*”).^{64a} A contemporary historian of *Augangzeb* writers, “if a stranger knocks at their door (i.e. the door of Sikhs) at midnight and utters the name of Nanak, though he may be a thief, robber or wretch, he is considered a friend and brother, and is properly looked after.’⁶⁵ Mir Ghulam Hussain Khan writes (1783 A.D.) about the Khalsa Panth, “When a person is once admitted into that fraternity, they make no scruple of associating with him, of whatever tribe, clan, or race he may have been hitherto; nor do they betray any of those scruples and prejudices so deeply rooted in the Hindu mind.’⁶⁶ Commenting on the last part of the statement, the editor says, ‘This alludes to the touching or eating with persons of impure castes, in regard to which the Hindus are so tenacious.’⁶⁷ The author of *Haqiqat* also writes about the same time that ‘the Sikh were told: “Whoever might join you from whichever tribe, don’t have any prejudice against him and without any superstition eat together with him.” *Now this is their custom,*^{67a}

Here we have good independent testimony from two sources that upto 1783, at least, the Sikhs drawn from all castes dined freely with each other. The Haqiqat clearly states that Khattris, Jats, Carpenters, blacksmiths and grain grocers all joined the Khalsa^{67b} and '*now this is their custom*'.

The significance of the spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization achieved by the Sikh movement can be realized only if it is contrasted with the caste background in which the change was brought about. Bougle observes: 'The spirit of caste unites these three tendencies, repulsion, hierarchy and hereditary specialization... We say that a society is characterized by such a system if it is divided into a large number of mutually opposed groups which are hereditary specialised and hierarchically arranged — if, on principle, it tolerates neither the parvenu, nor miscegenation, nor a change of profession.'⁶⁸ 'From the social and political point of view, caste is division, hatred, jealousy and distrust between neighbour'.⁶⁹ Nesafeld also comes to the conclusion that the caste system leads to a degree of social disunion to which no parallel can be found in human history. All authorities on caste are agreed that mutual repulsion and disunity, besides inequality and hierarchism, are the in-built constituents of the caste system.

e) *Pollution*

The most wide-spread expression of the mutual repulsion and disunion of the caste society were the restrictions on commensalism and the notions of pollution. It is an indisputable fact that the taboo on food and drink was its most widely practised feature which invited severe penalties. Of the offences of which a caste Panchayat took cognizance, the "Offences against the commensal taboos, which prevent members of the caste from eating, drinking, or smoking with members of another caste, or atleast of other castes regarded by the prohibiting caste as lower in social status than themselves, are undoubtedly the most important; for the transgression by one member of the caste if unknown and unpunished may affect the whole caste with pollution through his commensality with the rest."⁷⁰ 'If the member of low caste merely looks at the meal of a Brahmin, it ritually defiles the Brahmin,'⁷¹ and 'a stranger's shadow, or even the

glance of a man of low caste, falling on the cooking pot may necessitate throwing away the contents.'⁷² There are Indian proverbs that 'three Kanaujias require no less than thirteen hearths'⁷³, and that a 'Bisnoi mounted on a camel followed by a score more will immediately throw away his food if a man of another caste happens to touch the last animals.'⁷⁴ These proverbs may partly be exaggerations, but these do illustrate the extent to which the taboos on food had taken hold of the Indian life.

All the transgressions of the taboos on food and drink were always punished, because, as noted above, not to punish these affected the whole caste with pollution. In some cases, the consequences were quite serious and permanent. 'A separate lower caste (the Kallars) has arisen in Bengal among people who had infringed the ritual and dietary laws during the famine of 1866, and in consequence been excommunicated.'⁷⁵

Underlying the taboos on foods and drinks was the general notion of pollution which was very wide in its sphere of application. Because, it was supposed to be incurred not only by partaking of food and drinks under certain conditions, but by the mere bodily contact with persons of 'certain low castes, whose traditional occupation, whether actually followed or not, or whose mode of life places them outside the pale of Hindu society'.⁷⁶ Sweeper castes (from which Rangretas came) were one of these. "According to Barbosa, a Nayar woman touched by a Pulayan is outcaste for life and thinks only of leaving her home for fear of polluting her family."⁷⁷ This is, of course, an extreme case. 'Castes lower than a Brahmin are generally speaking less easily defiled, but the principle is the same, and contact with caste or outcastes of this category used to entail early steps to remove the pollution.'⁷⁸

Viewed against this background, the degree of social equality, brotherhood and fraternization achieved in the Sikh Panth was indeed, remarkable. And of this there is no doubt that the Panth comprised people drawn from all castes, including the lowest ones. We have already referred to the testimony of the Janamsakhies. Bhai Gurdas, in his eleventh Var, has given the names of some of the important Sikhs during the period of the first six Gurus. The list includes members drawn from all

castes ranging from Brahmins to Chandals (the lowest caste). Irvine writes: 'After the Khatri and the jat peasants, the most noticeable components of the Sikh body are the lower caste artisans and men of the outcaste or menial tribes. This fact attracted the notice of the Muhammadan writes, as we see in our account, taken from them of the disturbances following on the death of Guru Gobind Singh. Recent enquiries bear this out. In the census of 1881, nine out of every hundred Sikhs were of the outcaste scavenger and leather-dresser races, and the other thirteen were of the artisan class, one half of these being carpenters. On the other hand, there were only four Brahmins in every thousand.'⁷⁹

Irvine's figures gain added meaning if one agrees with the contemporary statement of Hugel, that it is only of late and with great difficulty that the Maharaja (Ranjit Singh) has been able to persuade some of the descendants of the higher castes to embrace the Sikh faith, and we shall show further how much trouble this has occasioned him'.⁸⁰ Polier wrote (1780 A.D.) that 'the Siques then began to increase greatly in number...; all that came, though from the lowest and most abject castes, were received contrary to the Hindu customs which admit of no change of caste, and even Mussalmans were in the number of converts.'⁸¹ Griffiths (1794) tells us that 'the Seiks receive Proselytes of almost every Caste, a point in which they differ most materially from the Hindoos'.⁸² The German Hugel describes the Sikhs of the time as 'the descendants from all the lowest castes of Hindus, from which they have been proselyted.'⁸³ These early accounts of the Europeans are all the more valuable, because, as already pointed out, these deal with the times of the Misals and Ranjit Singh, when the Sikh revolution had receded.

The participation of people derived from all castes in the revolutionary struggle further cemented among them the spirit of comradeship and fraternization. It was a cohesion sealed with the stamp of blood. Moreover, the Sikhs were inspired by a common cause, the cause of capturing power for the Khalsa. And, the Khalsa was constituted of people drawn from all castes, especially from the lower ones. No long-drawn-out guerilla warfare could be carried on without an ideological inspiration or without a deep commitment to mutual comradeship.

2. Inter-caste Marriages

It has been said that the Sikh movement did not do much to promote inter-caste marriages. This assertion has probably been made in order to detract from the anti-caste achievements of the movement. It appears that the role of endogamy** in the caste complex has either not been understood, or has been overemphasized.⁸⁴

i) *Endogamy and the caste complex*

Hutton writes: 'Indeed, it seems possible that caste endogamy is more or less incidental to the taboo on taking food cooked by a person of at any rate a lower, if not of any other caste, and in the view of the writer this taboo is probably the keystone of the whole system. It is not uncommon in some parts of India for a man of one caste to keep a concubine of a lower caste, or even a non-Hindu, and he is not outcast by his caste fellows on that ground, though he may be, and often is, on the ground that he has eaten food cooked or served by her or taken water from her hands. This suggests that the taboo on marriage is the necessary and inevitable outcome of the taboo on food and drink, rather than the cause of it.'⁸⁵ Hutton thus underscores the point that the problem of endogamy is only a part of the caste complex, and not an independent or a premier part at that. As such, its role should be viewed in this context and in the right perspective. The removal of endogamy is not indispensable for breaking up the caste structure. For, the caste has been losing its hold in India since it came in contact with the Western culture and the capitalist economy. But, all the same, not many inter-caste marriages have taken place since then so as to make any appreciable contribution to this development.

What is fundamental to the caste system is the preservation of the caste status, and the ritualistic and religious sanction which helped maintain that status. The restrictions on inter-caste marriages are made inflexible by the religious and ritualistic rules of the caste ideology. 'Among classes who marry among them-

selves, marriage outside the class is prevented by sentiment and not by hard and fast rules. Marriage outside the class in Europe might be rare and invalid, but in India, if it is contracted outside the caste, it is a sacrilege.’⁸⁶

What makes endogamy formidable and obnoxious in the caste are not prevented, as in class societies, primarily by sentiment, but by the ‘hard and fast’ rules of the caste ideology. These ‘hard and fast’ rules are not applicable exclusively to endogamy. Most of these rules, especially the social approach underlying them, cover in their ramifications almost the entire spectrum of caste mechanism. For example, caste endogamy is the product of the notion that Aryan blood is pure and the non-Aryan impure, and that the admixture of the two should be avoided. As the mixture of the Aryan and non-Aryan bloods had already taken place on a large scale, caste endogamy was enforced at a later state to compartmentalize this mixture so as to prevent further admixture. Exactly, the same principle or notion about the purity of Aryan blood and the impurity of non-Aryan blood underlies the injunctions against inter-dining among castes and pollution by contact or sight. “Despite their indispensability for a millenium, the impure castes have remained absolutely impure; because of the blood they inherit which could not be accepted as pure under any circumstances. All such people are magically defiled.’ ‘Their very presence may infect the air of a room and so defile food in its that it must be thrown away to prevent evil enchantment.’⁸⁷ The idea that certain persons defile if they sit down to a meal in one row is present in the Sutras.⁸⁸ Similarly, Gautma upholds that an impure person imparts pollution by his touch and even by his near approach.⁸⁹ In the later periods, these rules were further elaborated and made rigid. In the medieval Occident, “”here were factual barriers restricting the connubium between differently esteemed occupations, but there were not ritual barriers, such as are absolutely essential for caste. Within the circle of the ‘honourable’ people, ritual barriers were completely absent; but such barriers belong to the basis of caste differences’.⁹⁰ ‘Nowhere are endogamy and the exclusion of commensalism more rigidly observed than by the occupational castes, and this is by no means true only of the interrelation

of high and low castes. Impure castes shun infectious contact with non-members as rigidly as high castes. This may be taken as a conclusive proof of the fact that mutual exclusiveness was predominantly caused, not by social, but by ritualistic factors based on the quality of many of these castes as ancient guest or pariah people.⁹¹

All the above facts emphasize that the foundation on which the super-structure of injunctions against inter-caste marriages, inter-caste commensalism, inter-caste contact, pollution, etc., rested was the same. Ritual barriers or magical distance between castes in their mutual relationships (whether it applies to intercaste marriages, inter-caste commensalism, various notions about pollution or to the stigma attached to certain occupations) is a fundamental basis of the caste. 'The caste order is orientated religiously and ritually to a degree not even partially attained elsewhere.'⁹² 'Complete fraternization of castes has been and is impossible because it is one of the constitutive principles of the castes that there should be atleast ritually inviolable barriers against complete commensalism among different castes.'⁹³

ii) Restrictions in other societies

Another important point to be borne in mind is that caste restrictions on marriages are not the only restrictions current on marriages between exclusive groups. Individual and group prejudices against marriages, based on considerations of various kinds (viz., health, beauty, colour, race, class, etc.) exist in societies where there are no castes. In other words, caste endogamy is superimposed on prejudices about marriages between mutually exclusive groups common to non-caste societies as well. This leads to two corollaries. First, the problem of restrictions on marriages between exclusive groups or classes is not solved by the undoing of the caste endogamy. Secondly, the problem of removing prejudices regarding marriages, as it is in non-caste societies, is hard enough to solve. Because, in view of the very personal nature of the marriage relations and the human prejudices involved, no positive regulations can be prescribed in this field. Except for marriage restrictions imposed by the caste system, few societies have tended to lay down positive laws governing marriages between different social groups or

classes. No wonder the Plato's suggestion in this regard always remained as the odd ramblings of a philosopher's mind; and the attempt in Rome to regulate marriages through the Theodosian Code failed miserably. For the same reasons, the racial problem between the Whites and the Negroes in the USA, or elsewhere, continues to be intractable. The super-imposition of caste endogamy on the other prejudices regarding marriages made the problem doubly complicated.

iii) The Approach of the Sikh Movement

Gurus' stand on the issue is very clear. When the Muktas (the select band of Sikhs in the congregation of Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur who were given the honorific title for being foremost in living upto the ideals of Sikhism) advocated inter-caste marriages, the other Sikhs openly expressed their inability to follow this line. The matter was represented to the Guru himself. The Guru indicated that the advice of the Muktas should be followed. He said, 'The four castes are one brotherhood. The Guru's relationship to the four castes is common (i.e. equal). There is no doubt about it... Muktas are my own life. What they do is acceptable.'⁹⁴

'Caste is probably what Professor Bartlett would call one of the 'hard points' of Hindu culture, and any attempt to modify it by a direct attack on it is likely to provoke resistance and discord, and reformers will need to aim at some 'soft point', some other feature of the culture, that is, through which the 'hard point' can ultimately be circumvented and isolated.'⁹⁵ It is probably on this account that, 'In regard to the matter of the right to enter Hindu temples, the exterior castes were advised by Mr. Gandhi not to attempt to gain entry, as God resides in their breasts.'⁹⁶ If this cautious approach was necessary in the twentieth century, it was much more so in the times of the Sikh Gurus. They had to avoid taking steps that might affect adversely the very objectives of the movement. They were not idle dreamers interested only in the postulation and declaration of a utopian stand. They could not afford to sit in isolation tied to an abstract maxim. They were the leaders of a movement. Although they never swerved for a moment from their objectives, and even paid with their lives for not doing so, they had to weigh beforehand the feasibility of

each and every step they took in the light of its likely consequences on the course of the movement as a whole. As leaders keen to achieve practical results, they were aware of the necessity not only of carrying their followers with them, at least a majority of them, but also of ensuring their zealous participation. Evidently, they would not like to take such steps as might side-track the main problems.

There were open rifts in Sikh ranks at different places between those who wanted to stick to the old rite of Bhadan (cutting of the hair of the child at a certain stage of his life) and those who wanted to give it up following the Guru's injunction not to shave.⁹⁷ Where differences could crop up on such a minor issue, the Gurus could not risk the future of the movement by insisting on inter-caste marriages.

The abolition of the caste was not the only goal of the Sikh movement. It had also to fight the religious and political oppression of the rulers. In fact, the pursuit of this objective became more urgent especially when the Mughal rulers launched a frontal attack to convert the Hindus to Islam. The Sikh movement depended for all its recruitment to its ranks entirely on elements drawn from the caste society. It could not afford to cut itself off completely from the base of its recruitment. By doing so, none of the three social objectives of the movement would have been furthered. Neither would it have succeeded in building a society outside the caste order; nor could it have successfully challenged the religious and political domination, or captured political power for the masses.

It is in this context that the anti-caste stance of the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh movement has ever cared to adopt the issue of inter-class marriages as its plank. They know the human prejudices regarding marriages would automatically disappear with the levelling up of class differences. Similarly, the Gurus attacked the very fundamentals of the caste, i.e. caste-status consciousness and the ritualistic barriers between the castes. They hoped that caste endogamy would disappear with the disappearance of caste-status consciousness and these ritualistic barriers. They did not want to side-track the movement from the comparatively urgent problem of meeting the political challenge.

Secondly, as we have said, the Gurus did not want to cut off, as far as possible, the movement from the base of its recruitment. Two instances would amplify the point we want to stress. It was Guru Nanak who started the institution of Langar where people of all castes and creeds dined together. It was a very big step towards breaking the caste ritualistic barriers. But, it was Guru Amardas who made it a rule that no body could see him unless he had dined at the Langar. Possibly this could not be done all at once in the beginning, because it required time to educate and influence the people in overcoming the ritual or taboo by which one could not eat 'in the sight of people not belonging to one's caste'. In the famine of 1866 in Bengal, when people were forced by starvation to eat in the public soup kitchens opened by the Government, 'they made certain that often a sort of symbolic *chambre separee* has created for each caste by means of chalk lines drawn around the tables and similar devices.'¹⁰¹

Again, Guru Gobind Singh himself took away the *Janeo* of Alim Singh when he felt it necessary to prevent him from reverting to the caste society.¹⁰² But, the same Guru advised his Sikhs not to insist on anybody wearing *Janeo*,¹⁰³ nor coerce

* (Indubhusan writes, "As we have already seen, the Langars of the Gurus knew no caste distinctions, but this cannot be said to prove anything, this way or the other, as examples of relaxation of caste rules regarding sacred food distributed from a public sanctuary are to be found even among the most orthodox of Hindus"⁹⁸ The sacred food of the Sikhs is *Karah Prasad* and not the food of the langar. It is recorded in the *Guru Granth* that the wife of Guru Angad used to run the common kitchen. The word used is *Raso* (kitchen where meals are prepared). Guru Amar Das used to hold his religious congregations from early in the morning and would at noon 'lead his following (*Sangat*) to the Langar'⁹⁹, i.e. at a different place from that where the religious congregation was held. To this day Langars are attached to the *Gurdwaras*, but are not a part of the *Gurdwara* proper. Whereas *Karah Prasad* is offered in the *Gurdwara*, food is served in the Langar. The original text makes it quite clear that Guru Amardas would refuse to see a man who did not take food in the Langar; the Guru showed himself to him. He who did not partake food due to caste prejudices; he was not able to see the Guru.'¹⁰⁰ Indubhusan's observation is, thus, not correct factually)

anyone to forgo it.* The same was the Guru's approach regarding inter-caste marriages. While he approved of the proposal of the Muktas, he did not prescribe or insist on inter-caste marriages, leaving it to the Sikhs to follow it on their own.

3. The Status of Women

The Sikh movement had comprehensive egalitarian objectives. As such, raising the status of women formed an essential part of its programme. The caste ideology had assigned to women, including those of the upper castes, a low social position. In some respects they were bracketed with the Sudras. Guru Nanak declared, "Why call her bad from whom are born kings?"¹⁰⁴ Guru Amar Das abolished the customs of Purdah and Satti,¹⁰⁵ and of the twenty-two manjis, dioceses or preaching-districts, set up by him, some of them were headed by women.^{105a} The mother of Jassa Singh, the supreme leader of the Sikhs at one time, was a religious preacher.^{105b} Sukha Singh, who later became the commander hero in the battle of Chota Ghalu Ghara, was ostracized for some time by the Khalsa, because he or his wife were suspected of having committed infanticide and thereby having violated the traditional custom of the Khalsa.¹⁰⁶ The status of women raised by the movement

is reflected by the fact that they participated in the revolutionary struggle on equal terms with men. It was Mai Bhago who rallied the deserters from Anandpur and led them in the battle of Mukatsar.^{108a} In the period of guerilla warfare, Sikh women were imprisoned and subjected to hard labour, but they did not forsake their faith.^{108b} Sada Kaur, wife of Gurbakhsh Singh ruled the area which was under the control of Kannahya Misal. She led her armies in battle,¹⁰⁹ and Ranjit Singh owed his success, in his initial struggle for supremacy against the rival Misals, in no small measure to her political acumen and military help. Ahmed Shah Batalvi has given more instances where women took a leading part in the political and military activities of the Misals,¹¹⁰ 'Rani Rajinder Kaur was one of the most remarkable women of the age. She possessed all the virtues which men pretend their own — courage, perseverance and sagacity.'¹¹¹ Sahib Kaur was made the Chief Minister of Patiala in 1793. She refused to leave the battlefield when pressed by the Marathas near Ambala and with a drawn sword rallied her troops to repulse the enemy.¹¹² Similarly, Aus Kaur was placed at the head of the administration of Patiala and she conducted the affairs of that state with conspicuous success.¹¹³ George Thomas writes in his memoirs (p. 75) 'Instances indeed have not infrequently occurred in which they (Sikh women) have actually taken up arms to defend their habitations, from the desultory attacks of the enemy, and throughout the contest behaved themselves with an intrepidity of spirit, highly praiseworthy.'¹¹⁴

CHAPTER XII

Armed Struggle — its Egalitarian Basis

1. Egalitarian Aims

The second goal of the Sikh movement was to fight the religious and political domination of the Mughal rulers which threatened to undermine the very moral fabric of the society. This mission was a part and parcel of the Sikh thesis which stood for the total emancipation of man, including freedom from political and religious dictation. But, the Sikh movement was not a negative movement. It was not guided by the mere impulse of fighting Mughal domination, though this aspect naturally came more into the limelight because this was a prerequisite for gaining its positive ends. The second goal of the Sikh movement was intimately linked its third goal that the downtrodden masses should be the masters of their own political destiny. As such, the Sikh armed struggle cannot be understood without taking into consideration its overriding egalitarian objectives. The plebian mission was just a projection of the basis Sikh egalitarian approach to the political plane. As the plebian aims determined, as will be seen in the following chapter, the development, the course and the character of the movement, it is necessary that we clarify this point in detail. But, therefore we come to consider the plebian aims and the base of the movement, we would like to clarify the sense in which the term 'plebian' is used by us.

We shall be using the word plebian for want of a better expression. The Sikh movement, in its aims and character, was plebian in the broad sense of the term. For, it stood for the social and political rights of the downtrodden people. But, the word plebian should not at all bear the connotation of class

hatred or class war; for this would be opposed to the Sikh thesis which is fundamentally based on universal love. God prevades all hearts and there is nothing that is intrinsically or permanently bad. All fight against evil is to be based on love in its comprehensive sense and not on hatred. It is a historical fact that the Sikh code of war did not permit attacking a person who had laid down his arms, or one who became a fugitive from the battle field. 'It is true they seldom kill in cold blood or make slaves.'¹ The aim was to bring the erring person or persons on the right path. Forgiveness is one of the virtues on which great stress is laid in Sikhism. But this does not mean that if persons, groups or governments do not desist from their evil course, they are not to be fought against and are to be allowed a free run to harm the society. The ultimate good of the society as a whole is the criterion for judging all social action.

Revolutionary changes in social, political or economic systems can rarely, if every, be brought about without using force. And power in the final analysis means political and military power. The Gurus wanted to bring about revolutionary changes. It was for this purpose that Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa in order to capture political power for a plebian mission. He did not depend upon the privileged castes or classes to bring this about. He wanted the downtrodden, degraded and despised sections of the society to work out their own destiny. As it is an important issue, we refer to the original evidence in some detail.

Samarth Ram Das, the preceptor of Shivaji, met Guru Hargobind and questioned him : "You are wearing arms and keeping an army and horses. You have yourself called Sacha Padshah — A True King. What sort of a Sadhu are you?" Guru Hargobind said : "Internally a hermit, and externally a prince; arms mean protection for the poor and destruction for the tyrant."^{1a} Here the Guru links the arming of the Panth distinctly with a plebian purpose. This piece of testimony is very important because the meeting of the Guru and Ramdas is confirmed by a Maratha source.^{1b}

The overt military action of the Sikh movement against the rulers started when the Sikh captured the hawk of Emperor

Shah Jahan and refused to surrender it. Referring to this incident, Guru Hargobind, according to Gurbilas, said:

‘I will not give the hawk to them;
 (I wil) get the crown and hawk from them.
 I will wrest from them the sovereignty of the country;
 I will bestow this all on the poor and the helpless.’²

In the words of Koer Singh, when Guru Gobind Singh requested the five Beloved Ones to baptise him, he addressed them to the following effect:

‘Hear, Khalsa, with all attention,
 You are dearest of dear to me.

The Brahmins were proud that God had given the sovereignty of the world to them,

There was no ruler (Raja) like them in the world.

The Rajputs felt that they had been created from God’s arms.

But, Vaishya, Sudras and Jats in large numbers I have incorporated in the Panth.

The sovereignty of the whole world is given to you, the Khalsa,
 I have made you leaders of the Khalsa

The way you received Amrit (baptism) from the Guru,

I wish to receive it the same way from you.

The Guru and the Sikh are interwoven with one another,

It had been so recognized by the nine Gurus.

The Sikh and Guru are related to each other as head is to the body.’³

Here the conferment of political sovereignty on Vaishyas, Sudras and Jats in directly contrasted by the Guru with the Brahmanical scheme of reserving ruling power in the hands of ruling castes, the Brahmins and the Rajputs. So, there can be no doubt that the Guru’s plan was a direct reversal of the Brahmanical caste scheme, both in its social and its political aspects.

The Guru told the Brahmins, who had earlier boycotted the baptism ceremony of the Khalsa but later agreed to join it: ‘If you

still persist in creating difficulties, you will have no place of honour in the Panth, who is now going to be the ruler.’⁴

Guru Gobind Singh then sent for the hill Rajas and addressed them as follows:

‘You adopt the ways of the Khalsa;
 You have agreed to pay tribute to the Turks (Mughals);
 And regard yourselves as subordinates of the Turk.
 Come under the protection of the Khalsa, the banner of the
 Khalsa;
 Overturn the Mughal authority.
 Lest you should complain afterwards that
 I have discriminated against you,
 I have sent for you so that you may follow the leadership of the
 Khalsa.’⁵

This part of the text makes it clear that the Guru invited the hill Rajas to join the struggle against the Mughals, but on the condition that they accepted the objective of the Khalsa. He wanted them not as allies, who retained their caste and feudal ideology, but asked them first to accept the mission of the Khalsa. That is why the Guru asked them to learn at the feet of the Khalsa (‘Tuj ko khals charni laiya’) in order to imbibe the Khalsa ideology and, thus, come to have common purpose and aims.

The reaction of the hill Rajas to the Guru’s proposal is quite revealing. The replied:

‘You have welded four castes into one;
 How can we dine together with the four caste?
 How can you Panth get Raj?
 How can goats kill a tiger?
 Some do agriculture;
 Some deal in merchandise;
 Some are the despised castes of the foot-hill plains.
 How can these wrest from us our Raj? People will laugh at this idea.
 It is a preposterous idea that
 the twelve high castes should join the seven low castes.’⁶

For the hill Rajas it was simply unthinkable that they should have social equality, or make common cause, with the low castes, or that these low castes could ever succeed in getting Raj. In response to the reaction of the hill Rajas, the Guru said:

‘I am pleased with the sparrows (the Khalsa, most of whom were drawn from the low castes);

These sparrows will kill many hawks.

If I make the sparrows humble the hawks

Then alone shall I be satisfied.’⁷

This revolutionary aim appeared an impossible task to achieve not only to the hill Rajas, but also to some later historians, who wonder how Guru Gobind Singh could conceive of it. The author of Haqiqat wrote, ‘At that time Tegh Bahadur* very often spoke in the words of a mad man... As for example, The Sikhs were told: “Now it seems, rather, it is ordained that the hawks must be hunted by the sparrows”; that is, disgrace will reach the nobles from the lowly tribes and this the disciples regarded as a glad tidings for them.

‘Khalsa is the army of God’⁸, and ‘Khalsa is one who takes care of the poor’⁹, As such, it became its duty to fight the oppressor. “Khalsa is one who fights in the forefront.”¹⁰ The plebian cause and the duty of the Khalsa to fight for it are thus made inseparable.

Guru Gobind Singh is said to have addressed Bhai Nand Lal to the following effect:

‘Listen, Nand Lal, to this plan :

It will bring into being our Raj.

I shall weld four castes into one;

I shall make people remember God.

The Khalsa under the plan, will ride horses and support hawks;

The Turks will run away on seeing them.

It will make one man fight a lakh and a quarter;

He who dies (fighting) will be liberated....

* Here Teg Bahadur is confused for Guru Gobind Singh.

The drums will beat at every door-step...
 The Khalsa will be victorious from one end to the other.
 The Khalsa will rule; no one will remain unsubdued.
 Everyone will join the Khalsa. For, they alone would be saved,
 who submit to the Khalsa'.¹¹

A revolutionary's fulfilment lies when he feels himself equal to the heaviest odds ranged against him. (Sava lakh se ek laraoon'), and a plebian revolution, by its very nature, involves every hamlet in its whirlwind sweep ('Daur duar par naubat vaje').

There is a poetic composition of the eighteenth century by one Bhai Gurdas.** He writes:

'He (Guru Gobind Singh) created his own Khalsa Panth and blessed it with great vigour,

Khalsa, with hair on their heads, and sword in their hands,
 crushed all the tyrants.

No body stood his ground against them;

The Sirdars (chiefs) fled before them,

Rajas, kings and the wealthy were reduced to dust."¹²

It is significant that this verse brackets the wealthy with the Rajas, kings and Sirdars as the opponents of the Khalsa.

Ratan Singh Bhangu, in his introduction of his history of the Sikh Panth, says that the rulers are like tigers and hawks and the subjects like goats and partridges, and that he is writing the story of 'how goats killed tigers and the partridges killed hawks.'¹³ Bhangu further states:

'Sovereignty cannot be had without armed struggle;

The Guru initiated the armed struggle...

"The Guru gave sovereignty to the poor..., and

The seven Sanat (lowest castes) and twelve low castes,
 who know nothing of politics.

The world calls them rustic Jats, Bawas, Kirars, Khattris,
 Iron-smiths and carpenters of the low castes.

* This Bhai Gurdas is a different person from Bhai Gurdas who lived in the time of Guru Arjun

The Guru showed benevolence to the despised calico-printers, Kalals and the low-caste Gujars, Ahirs, Kambohs and Soods whom no one took into any account.

The Guru thought that water-carriers, barbers, Aroras, potters, Saini, Goldsmiths, sweepers (Chuhras), leather-workers,

Bhats, Brahmins, beggars, Bahoroopias, Lubanas and potters — all downtrodden should be given sovereignty; they would remember the gift of the Guru.’¹⁴

2. Plebian Base

The Sikh movement had not only a plebian political mission, but it had also a plebian base. It was necessary that the downtrodden castes and classes should be both the architects and masters of their own destiny. When Guru Hargobind declared his intention of arming the Panth, four hundred men volunteered their services. ‘Calico-printers, water-carriers, and sarpenters; Barbers, all came to (his) place.’¹⁵ The Muhammandan survivors of the battle of Lohgarh reported: ‘Although the Sikhs were of all castes and trade, they proved brave in battle, and the Imperial army was not to blame for its defeat.’¹⁶ The Subedar of Jullundur agreed to mount an expedition against Guru Hargobind, because ‘it was supposed that the few men the Guru had with him were a worthless rabble, since they had been enlisted from the dregs of the people. It was said that they consisted only of strolling singers, barbers, washermen, cobblers, and such like, who would disperse the moment they found themselves confronted with the regular troops.’¹⁷ Painsa Khan deserted the Guru and told the Emperor that the Guru had no army. ‘Barbers, Washermen, , pedlars, strolling minstrels, and similar unwarlike people compose that he calleth his army.’¹⁸

When asked by the Raja what kind of army Guru Gobind Singh had, Bhikhan Khan replied:

‘Subject people have come together; rustic Jats, oil-pressers, barbers, Bhati, Lubana, Leather-dressers. Many Banias, Aroras, Bhats; Sudras, Calico-printers, Jats, carpenters, twelve castes and Sanat (low castes) are joined; these are

trained in the use of arrows. They include Kalals and goldsmiths, who do not know how to wield a spear.’¹⁹

Bhangu has referred to the plebian composition of the Khalsa at several places.²⁰ When the Tarana Dal wing of the Khalsa Dal was reorganized into five divisions, one of the divisions was under the command of Bir Singh Rangreta.²¹ This division continued to participate in the campaigns of the Khalsa right up to the time of the conquest of Malerkotla.²² In the great battle with Abdali, called Wada Ghalu Ghara because the largest number of Sikhs in a single battle were killed here, it is specially mentioned that Ramdasias (cobblers) and Rangretas took a prominent part.²³

The Plebian composition of the Khalsa is corroborated also by evidence from non-Sikh sources. Banda’s forces were recruited chiefly from the lower caste Hindus, and scavengers, leather-dressers and such like persons were very numerous among them.²⁴ The low-caste people who swelled Banda’s ranks are termed by a contemporary Muslim historian, as already quoted, as the dregs of the society of the hellish Hindus.^{24a} Another contemporary Muslim writer says that Banda brought into the forefront the unemployed and worthless people who had hitherto been hidden by the curtain by the curtain of insignificance.^{24b} Khafi Khan says that ‘these infidels (Sikhs) had set up a new rule, and had forbidden the shaving of the hair of the head and beard. Many of the ill-disposed low-caste Hindus joined themselves to them, and placing their lives at the disposal of these evil-minded people, they found their own advantage in professing belief and obedience, and they were active in persecuting and killing other castes of Hindus.’²⁵

3. Not Sectarian

The egalitarian political aims of the Sikh movement are also brought out by the negative evidence that it was not sectarian or based on clanish, tribal, feudal or dynastic loyalties and ambitions. There is a reference in Vachitar Natak that Guru Teg Bahadur sacrificed his life to save the sacred thread (Janeo) of the Hindus. An erroneous inference, therefore, might be drawn that the Sikh movement aimed at the revival of Brahmanism.

There are hymns of Guru Nanak wherein he belittles the custom of wearing the sacred thread (Janeo) and of applying the frontal mark on the forehead (Tilak).²⁶ Guru Nanak's father remonstrated with him for not applying the frontal mark of Hindus (Tilak) on his forehead.²⁷ Koer Singh writes that after the creation of the Khalsa, the sacred threads (Janeos) were caste away,²⁸ and Khushwant Rai, historian, supports his statement.²⁹ In some of the Rehatnamas, the wearing of Janeo is not only discarded, but server consequences are mentioned for those of the Khalsa who wear it.³⁰ It is recorded that 'Brahmins and Khatries now came in fewer numbers' to meet Guru Gobind Singh, because they 'did not wish that their sacrificial threads should be thrown away among the bushes', and 'reproached him for having taken away the distinguishing marks of the Hindus'.³¹ Guru Gobind Singh took away the sacrificial thread of Alim Singh, 'because if he retained it, he would still be a Brahmin, and be subject to Brahmanical superstitions.'³² Similarly, the Guru wrote to Aurangzeb that he was an idol-breaker,³³ and yet it is he who created the Khalsa to fight the Emperor's frontal attack on Hindu idols and temples and lauds the sacrifice of his father to save Janeo and Tilak.³⁴ the immediate cause of his father's attest and execution was that the Kashmiri Pandits had sought Guru Tegh Bahadur's protection from forcible conversion to Islam. The Sikhs fought this religio-political oppression not because they favoured Brahmanism, but because no moral, religious or spiritual growth could take place under any kind of social, religious or political oppression.

The Sikh movement fought the rulers, who happened to be Muslims, but it was not anti-Islam or anti-Muslim. We have already seen that it was a cosmopolitan movement in its conception and inception. It was a movement for human freedom which embraced all sections of the society. It was Guru Gobind Singh who created the Khalsa to wage a relentless struggle against the religious dictation and political oppression of the Mughal rulers. His universal approach is clear from his hymns. "The temple and the mosque are the same; the Hindu worship and the Mussalman prayer are the same; all men are the same; it is through error they appear different."³⁵ We have also given instances earlier of Muslims who sided with the Guru in his battles against the

Muslim rulers; not out of worldly considerations but because they considered his cause to be just. The Guru hailed Saiyed Budhan Shah as 'a true priest of God', meaning that he was serving the cause of God, and presented him (Budhan Shah) with his turban and comb which were preserved by his descendants as a relic till these were procured by the Chief of Nabha.'³⁶

4. Not Clannish or Feudal

The Sikh armed struggle was not based on clannish, tribal, feudal or dynastic loyalties or ambitions either. Guru Gobind Singh was not interested in political power for himself.^{36a} The only tribes from which a sizable number of Sikhs were drawn were Jats. But, as they shed off their Jatism when they joined the Khalsa, the question of their retaining their original clannish and tribal ties did not arise. Brahmins, Khatries, Jats and low castes, the lowest of them, participated in the struggle not as members of their original castes, but as members of the egalitarian Khalsa brotherhood. Unlike the Marathas, they were not held together by a regional nationalism. Of the five Beloved Ones, who formed the nucleus of the Khalsa leadership, one belonged to Hastanpur (U.P.), one to Dwarka (Saurashtra), one to Bidar (Karnataka) and one to Jagannath (Orissa).³⁷ The Sikhs were cemented together by the ideology of the Khalsa. The Brahmins and Khatries who joined the Sikh ranks had no hesitation in bowing to the Masands many of whom were from the Jats.³⁸ Everyone accepted the Jats, Kalals and Rangretas, the lowest caste, as one's equals in the Khalsa Dal.

The leadership always went to the most deserving Sikh, irrespective of his caste or the size of his group. After the Gurus, the Jats accepted the leadership of non-Jats, first of Banda and then of Jassa Singh Kalal, a not much respected caste. Out of the five divisions of the Taurana dal, Jats were commanders of only two.³⁹ The commander of Sikh forces at the time of Chota Ghalu Ghara was Sukha Singh, a carpenter.⁴⁰ This tradition was so strong that even during the Misal period the leader of one of the Misals was one Jassa Singh, a carpenter. During the revolutionary period, there were rifts in the Sikh ranks on questions of principles, but there is not one instance of

a division having taken place, or of even an argument having been advanced, on account of the distinctions of castes, clans or tribes. It is this egalitarian tradition which governed the development of the Sikh movement, which we have now to consider.

CHAPTER XIII

Armed Struggle — Its Development

The Sikh movement, as seen, had an egalitarian political mission. In order to achieve this objective, the movement needed a plebian base as well as a military organization of people politically motivated by that mission. Both these tasks were of formidable dimensions, because the caste ideology and the caste system had never allowed the political aspirations of the masses to germinate. They never even conceived the idea of capturing political power for their own interests and at their own initiative. The caste ideology had indoctrinated them to follow blindly the ruling castes. The reaction of the caste society to Muslim political and religious domination makes it clear.

1. How the Caste Society Reacted

The growth of the caste system and the caste society was a gradual process. This process of expansion was not done in one sweep. Different tribes, clans and communities were assimilated in the caste society at widely separated periods of history. It was not incumbent on the affiliated groups to accept the caste ideology in its entirety. So long as the affiliated group did not disturb the overall framework of the caste order, and refrained from a few of the acts absolutely abhorrent to Hinduism, e.g. beef-eating, it could even retain its previous customs and usages. Of course, the group or groups could be affiliated only as a part of some old caste, or as a new caste. Individuals, as individuals, found no place in that society. The more one conformed to the established caste norms, the better the social position one got in the caste hierarchy. All this led to the formation of a patchwork type of society, with widely varying patterns of caste norms and usages.

For this reason, generalizations about the caste society, especially of a positive nature, will have some minor exceptions to them. But formulations have to be made in order to express the dominant tendencies or directions of a system or a movement. Subject to this consideration, one of the very important features of the Indian Society was that the mass of the people were deliberately precluded from all political and military activity. This explains the marked absence of any militant political movement at the initiative and in the interests of the masses.

a) Prostration: This political and military inertia of the Indian population did not develop by accident. It was a part of the clearly thought out design of the caste ideologues. According to the Aitareya Brahmana (vii. 29.3), "he (Vaisya) is to be lived on by another and to be oppressed at will." To achieve this purpose, the Brahmins made the use of arms the sole prerogative of the ruling castes, e.g. to begin with the Kshatriyas, and, later, the legitimized Rajputs. This was the best arrangement they could make. The outcome of the struggle for political power between the different elements of the ruling caste did not affect the Brahmins as a caste. Whosoever won had to be guided by his Purohita. Besides, the legitimation of the caste status of the ruling castes was solely in the hands of the Brahmins as a caste. Whosoever won had to be guided by his Purohita. Besides, the legitimation of the caste status of the ruling castes was solely in the hands of the Brahmins. 'Legitimation by a recognized religion has always been decisive for an alliance between politically and socially dominant classes and the priesthood.'¹ It was much more so in the caste society.

So, from the time Brahminism became supreme, the mass of the people were reduced to the status of idle spectators to the struggle from military and political supremacy that raged around them. Megasthenes noted that the peasants went about their work quite unconcerned close to the battle-fields. Whether the people were totally disarmed or not is not quite certain; but it is clear that they were psychologically disarmed by the caste ideology. Pacifism and the caste system 'blocked the development of the military power of the citizenry; pacifism blocked it in principle and the castes in practice, by hindering the establishment of a polis or commune in the European sense.'² It was for this reason that, on the eclipse of the Kshatriyas, a few petty Rajput princes, springing up from the desert of Jasselmere, were

able to usurp political power practically throughout northern India.³

The same phenomenon repeated itself, more or less, when the Muslim invaders conquered the country. We are not alluding here to battles lost against them, because even the best of well-prepared nations have suffered defeats. What is painful is that, sometimes, a handful of foreigners overran vast tracts of the land without encountering any sizable resistance. Shihab-ud-din Gauri won the second battle of Tarain in 1192 and within fourteen years, his General, Bakhtiyar Khiliji, had reached the bank of the Brahmaputra. Nadiya was occupied with an advance party of no more than eighteen horsemen⁴, and this opened the way for the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal. Sharma writes: 'In the history of the fateful forty-five years (1295-1340) traced by us so far, the one distressfully disappointing feature has been the absence, in Maharashtra, of the will to resist... The people of Maharashtra were conquered, oppressed and humiliated, but they meekly submitted like dum driven cattle'.⁵ What is even more painful is that, once the back of the military power of the ruling castes was broken, there was practically no organized notable attempt on the initiative of the local people to overthrow the foreign power. This is the spectacle till we come to the rise of the Marathas under Shivaji and that of the Sikhs. Genghis Khan was more ruthless than Mahmood Ghaznavi, and he out-generalled the powers of three empires.⁶ But, after the flight of Mohammad Shah of Kharsen, the population of the Muslim countries, like that of China, rose against him.⁷ Nothing of the kind happened in India.

Mahmood Ghaznavi destroyed all the important Hindu temples in Northern India, from Mathura to Somnath. "In the early Muhammadan period it is not too much to say that every great mosque was erected from the materials of ruined shrines of the older faith of the Hindu or Jain".⁸ Mahmood believed that it behoved him 'to root out the worship of idols from the face of all India.' Most of the Muslim rulers and the Ulemas sincerely believed to be their Shariatic duty, either to bring, even by force, the non-Muslims into the Islamic fold, or to reduce them to second-rate citizens. Such was the religious bigotry of those times. But, in the caste society, there was hardly any significant

militant reaction to this blatant political and religious persecution.

This sad aspect of our history is sometimes sought to be explained on grounds, which may be partially correct but are not wholly tenable. It is said that the climate of the land and the softening influence of a civilized way of life enervated the Indians as against the sturdy invading nomads. But the Rajputs did not loose for lack of valour. This was acknowledged even by their adverseries. Thousands of Rajputs partook in Johars. Akbar was so impressed by the valour of Jaimal and Phatta in defending Chitor that he had their status erected at the most conspicuous entrance to his palace at Delhi.⁹ Muslim invaders were more than once at the point of losing their Indian battles, and Muhammad of Ghur was actually defeated in the first battle of Tarori. Much later, the British rulers of India succeeded in recruiting large numbers of soldiers during the last two world wars. Another reason usually mentioned is that the Indians lacked unity. They did lack it, but their humiliation cannot be ascribed solely to that disunity between the warring Hindu Lords. Disunity is a common feature of many, if not all, medieval political systems. Mahmood Ghaznavi had to beat hasty retreats from India a number of times because his home principality was threatened or attacked in his absence by his rivals to power. The prostration of the Indians and their disunity were due to a more basic cause.

b) Prostration and Caste

The basic cause of India disunity and prostration was the caste system. The very constitution of the caste system is the anti-thesis of social cohesion. Social exclusiveness and repulsion between castes or sub-castes are the very essence of the caste order. Caste 'grows by fission'¹⁰, and, in this process, went on creating new mutually exclusive and antagonistic social groups. It was an irony of this system that it deprived its constituents of 'unity of purpose' and rendered them incapable of 'unity of action', and yet it was the only social framework which held them together. 'It is likely also that a further political consequence of the caste system has been to simplify the intrusion of foreign invaders by opposing to them a society irreparably split up and unable to combine, a society that has for centuries lacked a national life, so much so, perhaps, as to justify Bougle's apophthegm that for

Hindus patriotism consists in attachment to the caste system and they achieve the paradox of being unable to unite except in the very culture pattern that divides them.’^{10a} it is stressed by some writers that Hindu religion and culture were a great cohesive force which bound the Hindus together. Sarkar is, however, of the opinion that the Hindus ‘could not possibly form a nation or even one compact sect.’¹¹ Hindu religion has no “congregation.”¹² In an case, it should be clear from the lack of marked resistance to the Muslim domination that, even if Hindu religion and culture had some sort of a cohesive quality, it was not strong enough to impel the Hindus to fight for their defence. The mere existence of hatred or sentiment does not lead to movements. The minimum requirements for building up a movement are cohesion among the people, unity and strength of purpose, an organization and a determined and inspired leadership. The very ethos of the caste order precluded it from providing such a cohesion, ‘unity of purpose’, and the organization needed to carry it out.

The prospects of the caste providing leadership to the Hindus against the domination of foreign Muslim rulers were equally dim. The caste ideology had reserved the leadership of the caste society for the Brahmins and the ruling castes, predominantly the Rajputs at the time of the Muhammadan conquest. According to the caste ideology, merit and efficiency from the ranks of other castes could not even aspire to it. Hemu, a Bania, led the armies of a Muslims emperor for a major battle. Malik Kafur and Malik Khusrau, both of whom were slaves and converts from low Hindu castes,^{12a} conquered and laid down the foundations of Muslim rule in South India. But there could be no such place for them in the caste ideology. The reluctance to legitimize shivaji’s sovereignty was, by implication, a censure by the ideology on his achievements against theMughals, or rather on his right to these achievements. The collaboration of the Rajputs with the Mughals had brought about a situation for which the caste society had made no provision. A vacuum was created in the military leadership of the caste society. Who was to fill it and how ? If the caste ideology had its say, no one could fill it. It is true that Brahminism had been accommodating upstart ruling castes in its system. But that usually took a long time, because a good deal of

hocus-pocus and subterfuge was needed to invest them with faked caste-status and geneologies. The abrupt conquest by Muslims left little time for this kind of manoeuvre. The failure of Hindus to stand up against Muslim domination was not so much a failure of the people; it was a failure of the caste system.

The caste ideology or the caste system was not only incapable of giving rise to movements requiring united action, it had also a strong potentiality for dragging such movements into its old ruts to the extent these came under its perverse influence. The Maratha leaders do not appear to have grasped the lesson that their movement owed its existence to their being comparatively free from the shackles of the caste. Had they been conscious of this fact, they should have worked for further loosening its bonds, instead of, as they did, deliberately strengthening them. Jadunath Sarkar has clinched the issue: 'A Hindu revival like the empire of the Peshwas, instead of uniting them (Hindus) only embittered caste bickering by intensifying orthodoxy, leading to a stricter repression of the lower castes by the forces of the States, and provoking more widespread and organised caste feuds, like those between the different subdivisions of the Deccani Brahmins or between the only two literate and well-to-do castes of Maharashtra, viz., the Brahmins and the Prabhus.'¹³ He comes to the further conclusion that 'the separatist tendency is as strong in their religion as in their society', and 'reform was possible only outside the regular Hindu Church followed by the masses, i.e. among the small non-conforming sects, where men were prepared to leave all things and follow truth,...'¹⁴ But, Sarkar misses another vital factor. The caste helped Hindu feudalism to consolidate its hold on the masses. Therefore, it was in the interests of the Hindu feudal system to uphold caste. It was a vicious circle. It was, therefore, essential not only to keep liberal movements outside the 'regular Hindu Church' and the caste society, but also to keep clear of the feudal track.

In this background, the masses could be led on to the path of achieving plebian political objectives gradually and step by step.

2. Preliminary Stage

The Khattris looked down upon the Jats, and the Jats would not even entertain the idea of giving social equality to castes like carpenters, barbers, leather-workers, weavers, potters, washermen and sweepers. There were further social barriers among castes lower than the Jats. In fact, the organizations for the enforcement of caste rules were more efficient in these lower caste.¹⁵ Even occupational castes would throw away their food if touched by a Chuhra, who is socially 'the lowest of the low.'¹⁶ It is these and such elements which the Sikh movement had to weld together into a new society on the basis of a new ideology. As such, the egalitarian society, the Sikh Panth, which the Guru had been assiduously building up, was a part and parcel of the plan to provide a plebian base to the militant revolutionary movement to come.

The second task of creating a plebian military organisation was no less difficult. Here there was no ready-made pronounced feeling of regional identity like the one the Marathas had. 'The Marathas have always formed a separate nation and still regard themselves as such.'¹⁷ This dormant sentiment needed only a touch of an inspired leader to activate and yoke it to the interests of the Marathas. There was no such strong regional perception in the Punjab which could rise above caste divisions. The Sikh movement had to weld together disparate elements, drawn from mutually exclusive castes, into a homogeneous unit, and give them altogether new values and a solidarity which were indispensable for fighting the greatest empire of the time. The Marathas had military traditions noted as far back as the seventh century by Yuan Chwang.¹⁸ Before Shivaji, the Marathas had battle-seasoned military leadership and personnel who had been in the service of the southern Pathan Kingdoms.¹⁹ The Sikh movement had to build up a military tradition, all its own, among the downtrodden people who had been debarred the use of arms by the caste ideology. Moreover, in building up this new military tradition, it had to work against the Indian prejudice that religion and the wielding of arms, even for noble purposes, were, to say the least, incongruous.

The first step was to change the attitude of the castes, who had always been ruled by other, towards the established authority.

The caste ideology had brought these castes under the spell that it was their religious duty to obey the ruling castes, as it was the divine right of the ruling castes to rule them. That was why the mass of the people had shown no military and political initiative. The Gurus recognized no other authority than that of God. “The beggar is called the king, the fool is termed wise.”19a “The Guru is the true King; false are the kings of the world.”19b Thus, Guru Angad ignored Hamayun.19c.

The second step was to build up a clear alternative to the ruling sovereign. Opposition to authority, in its nascent stage, has often assumed symbolic forms which would catch the ruling authorities in two minds, as to whether or not to resort to immediate repression on that particular account. The wearing of Khadar and the bonfiring of foreign cloth during the nationalist movement of India are examples which can be readily appreciated. As the movement gathers momentum, this opposition is transformed into open defiance. For this purpose, the ideal of Sacha Padshah (the true king) was set up (‘Sikhan Guru ha re Sacha Padshah yani Badsah-I-haqiqat midanand.’19d Sacha Padshah, as its very name implies, was to be a combination of spiritual and temporal authority in one; and was to be the embodiment of values Sikhism stood for, as opposed to all political authority based on injustice, oppression and exploitation. This ideal was not only setup, but was also institutionlised. Guru Arjan used to hold assemblies which gave them the look of royal Durbars (court),19e and hence forth the Guru was looked upon by his followers as a worldly lord and a ruling sovereign.19f Emperor Jahangir himself noted that the Guru had “noised himself as a religious and a worldly leader.’19g

There is a story that Akbar once asked Birbal how to make a given line look shorter than before without altering it. Birbal drew a longer line close to the original one and made it look comparatively short. This very idea of sach a padshah belittled the image of the Mughal Emperors. It withdrew the allegiance of the Sikhs from the rulers and focussed it on the Gurus (Sacha Padshah), the centres of incipient revolt. The loyalty of the Sikhs to the Guru was absolute. There was no room in it for dual fidelity which could face bothways, towards the Padshah (Mughal Emperor) and the Guru (SachaPadshah). The Guru

was supreme in both field. The foundation for creating and carving out an independent political state was clearly laid.

The important point is that the ideal of Sacha Padshah was not set up casually. That it was meant to be a deliberate challenge to the ruling state is clear from the manner the Gurus stuck to it despite the serious consequences it led to. One of the reasons of Guru Arjan's martyrdom was that Jahangir considered that the guru noised himself as a 'worldly leader'. Ram Rai incited the Emperor with his allegation that Guru Teg Bahadur boasted of badshahi-karamat, i.e. kingship and miracle.^{19h} Khushwant Rai states that, some of the Sikhs, apparently dazzled by the brilliance of the Guru's darbar, were prompted to lay claims to sovereignty ("Nazar ber wafur-I-muridanash sarzad shudan grift, whama waqt der shan-I-Guru *lafaz-I-badshahi* yani sach a patshah mi guftand."¹⁹ⁱ Irvine writes: 'One of this Guru's (Guru Teg Bahadur's) crimes, in the Emperor's eyes, may have been the style of address adopted by his disciples who had begun to call their leader sach a Padshah or the 'True King'. This title was readily capable of two-fold interpretatin : It might be applied as the occasion served in a spiritual and literal sense. Its use was extremely likely to provoke the mistrust of a ruler even less suspicious by nature than the Alamgir.'^{19j} According to *Risala-I-Nanakshah*, Aurangzeb did enquire of the Guru: 'people address you as Sacha Patshah. You have given yourself the name of Teg Bahadur. It is vanity '(Shuma ra sach a patshah minamand w mausum b Tegh Bahadur lasti. In Khudnumai ast).^{19k} Instead of trying to assuage the Emperor's suspicions, Guru Teg Bahadur replied, that whatever it was, it reflected the Will of the Almighty. The faqir was not concerned with the fame or defame it brought (Tegh Bahadur jawab dad, her che hast min janib-I-Allah. Faqir ra az nam-o-nang sarokar nist')^{19l} It is note-worthy that this reply of the guru is similar in tone to the one when he refused to disarm himself when he was required by Aurangzeb to do so.²⁰

3. A Challenge

Besides this gradual but deliberate build-up of morale against the oppressive political authority, all the Sikh Gurus followed a

course which was bound to pose a political challenge to the Mughal power. This challenge was inherent in the Sikh thesis itself and formed a part of the political struggle. In fact, adherence to the Sikh thesis would have posed a challenge to every political power which denied religious, social or political freedom. Had it been a Hindu state bent upon enforcing caste rules, its conflict with the Sikh movement would have been as inevitable as it was with the mughal rulers who were guided by their bigoted interpretation of the Shariatic law. In the medieval period, the states the world over were, by and large, theocratic, which derived their social and political laws from the narrow interpretation of religion. Such states usually discriminated, every persecuted, the non-conformists. The history of the Inquisition in the Christian world has its own tale to tell. The Muslim states of that period could not be exceptions. But, we have to single out the Shariatic concept of the Muslim theocratic state because it was the one the Sikh movement had to deal with. 'By the theory of its origin the Muslim State is a theocracy ... In such a state, infidelity is logically equivalent to treason... Therefore, the toleration of any sect outside the fold of orthodox Islam is no better than compounding with sin ... The conversion of the entire population to Islam and the extinction of every form of dissent is the ideal of the Muslim State.'^{20a} There were shades of differences in the interpretation of the Shariat, and there were concessions to political exigencies, but this Shariatic basis of the Muslim state was not questioned in principle.

It is obvious that the enforcement of the Shariatic concept of Muslim state posed a permanent challenge to its non-Muslim subjects. "After conquest the entire infidel population becomes theoretically reduced to the status of slaves of the conquering army ... As for the non-combatants among the vanquished, if they are not massacred outright — as the Canon lawyer Shafi declares to be the Quranic injunction — it is only to give them a respite till they are so wisely guided as to accept the true faith."^{20b} 'A non-Muslim, therefore, cannot be a citizen of the state; he is a member of a depressed class; his status is a modified form of slavery.'^{20c} At best, the non-Muslim were second-rate citizens (Zimmis), and one of the mild discrimination against

them was that they were required to pay Jaziya which was designed to humiliate them. 'No other religious authority except the great Imam (Hanifa), whose faith we follow, has sanctioned the imposition of the Jaziya on Hindus. According to all other theologians, the rule for Hindus is 'Either death or Islam.'²¹

The Sikh thesis aimed at the total emancipation of man. It did not regard religion as a ritual or ceremonial obligation, or as a mere quest for spiritual bliss, which could be at the same time compatible with political slavery or religious dictation. Hence, confrontation with the Muslim State based on the interpretation of the Shariatic law, as indicated above, was inherent in the Sikh thesis itself. How this confrontation developed was a question of time and circumstances.

Emperor Jahangir wrote in his autobiography: "A Hindu named Arjan lived at Govindwal on the bank of river Beas in the garb of a saint and spiritual guide. As a result many of the simple-minded Hindus as well as ignorant and foolish Muslims had been persuaded to adopt his ways and manners and he had raised aloft the standard of sainthood and holiness. He was called Guru. From all sides cowboys and idiots became his fast followers. This business had flourished for three or four generations. For a long time it had been in my mind to put a stop to this vain affair (Dukan-e-batil) or to bring him in the fold of Islam."²² it is clear that the fact of some Muhammadans having become followers of the Guru had irked Jahangir. Sheikh Ahmad Sarhindi, the head of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, was the leader of a revivalist movement of Islam. He had raised a standard of theological revolt against Akbar's religious liberalism and was given the titles of 'Reviver of the second millennium', and the 'Godly Imam'.^{22a} When he heard the news of Guru Arjan's execution, he was very much delighted. This is what he wrote to Murtza Khan, the Governor of Lahore: "The execution at this time of the accursed Kafir of Govindwal... is an act of the highest grace for the followers of Islam."²³ In other words, the Sheikh, who was not a politician and looked at the situation from his religious point of view, regarded the Guru a great hurdle in the way of Islam, because he calls his execution as an act of the 'highest grace'. It could be for three reasons. The Shariat law forbade the conversion of Muslims

to other faith. It advocated the forcible conversion of non-Muslims to Islam and, failing that, their reduction to second-rate citizens (Zimmis).

The confrontation between the Sikh movement and the Muhammadan power bent upon enforcing the Shariat was, therefore, inevitable. It was a clash between two opposed ideologies. It was not a question of mere conversion from one sect to another. Nor was it merely because the state happened to be a Muhammadan state. It was rather an irony of fate that the followers of the two religions, which were so close to each other, at least in their social approach, were to be locked in an unavoidable collision. Had there been a Hindu state at that time, and had it tried to impose caste regulations on the Sikh movement, the conflict between that Hindu state and the Sikh movement would have been as inevitable as it became in the present case. The basic principle of creating a free society was involved. The Sikh Gurus could not remain indifferent when religious freedom was denied.

4. Religion and Politics Entwined

The struggle of the Sikh movement against the Muslim State based on the Shariatic law was as much political as it was religious. In the theocratic Muslim State, politics could not be separated from religion. 'Civil law is completely subordinated to Religious law and, indeed, merges its existence in the latter. The civil authorities exist solely to spread and enforce the true faith.'^{23a} One Brahmin was put to death simply for saying that as is Islam true, so is Hinduism,²⁴ and the penalty for apostasy according to the Shariat was death. This part of the Shariatic law and other injunctions for the suppression or the forcible conversion of non-Muslims could not be enforced without political power. Also, the Muslim rule in India, which was an imposition on non-Muslim who were in a great majority, depended mainly on the support of the Muslims who were rallied around on the plea that the Muslim rulers were the upholders and propagators of the Shariat. The imposition of the Shariatic law on non-Muslims and the political power of the Muslim State were, therefore, inseparably related to each other. Consequently, any movement, which stood for complete human freedom

and hence challenged the Shariatic law, also challenged the political power which supported it or derived power from it.

Beside this, any policy or activity, the deliberate and consistent pursuit of which is going to lead to confrontation with the established power, is political in its aims and content. If the picking up of salt crystals at Dunees by Mahatma Gandhi could spearhead the civil disobedience movement against the British Raj, resisting the Shariat law and the enrolling of Muhammandans to the Sikh ranks was comparatively far too serious an affair in the bigoted medieval Muslim State. And there is no doubt that Jahangir himself realized the political implications of the Sikh movement also because in his autobiography he clearly mentions that Guru Arjan 'noised himself as a worldly leader'.

In spite of this unambiguous position, an erroneous impression persists that the Sikh movement was a purely religious movement before it took a political turn with the martyrdom of Guru Arjan. One reason for this is that the Sikh Gurus conceived and expressed the entire arena of human activity in religious terms. Guru Gobind Singh says : "I assumed birth for the purpose of spreading the faith, saving the saints, and extirpating all tyrants."^{24a} Here in the context of his Times, the extirpation of tyrants meant the extirpation of the bigoted Muslim rulers who possessed their subjects. It was clearly a political mission but it was linked with the 'spreading of the faith'. In other words, the spreading of the Sikh faith was a part of the political Sikh mission and Guru Gobind Singh expressly stated that he was following the path laid by the previous Gurus. Apart from the Guru's own religious approach, there was no other way for mobilizing the Indian masses for the achievement of those plebian political objectives which the Sikh movement had in view. The Marathas had all along a vague sense of their identity, but, besides other factors, they needed a religious inspiration to strengthen the bonds of their nationhood. The Sikhs had to give shape to a political force by uniting those elements of the population who had no consciousness of their political destiny, who were split up into mutually exclusive groups, and whose political aspirations and initiative had been strangled by the caste ideology. In the context of medieval Indian conditions, it is very

doubtful whether the disparate caste groups could be welded together for a common purpose, and the masses could be aroused to work out their own destiny, through any ideology other than a religious one.

Another reason for the erroneous impression probably is that the first four Gurus did not take overt political steps against the rulers. 'There seems to have been an intermediate stage in the evolution of the Sikh military machine out of the Sikh religious fraternity which had been founded by Nanak about a hundred years before Hargovind's time. In the last quarter of the sixteenth century of the Christian Era the Sikh community seems to have assumed a form which was already political though it was not yet warlike.'^{24b} This intermediate state was inevitable because the Sikh Gurus were not interested in making empty declarations or idle gestures. They aimed at building a mass movement and had to avoid taking premature false steps which could unnecessarily jeopardize the movement in its nascent stage. What is important is that they consistently pursued the objectives of the movement and did not deviate from them or compromise when faced with dire consequences. Guru Nanak did not desist from preaching his gospel in Kabul when warned that it was highly risky to do so in a Muslim country.²⁵

What is even more significant is that the Gurus, before Guru Arjan and after him, did not hesitate to admit those Muslims to their faith who wanted to join. This was deliberate defiance of the Shariatic concept of the Muslim State. If the political confrontation had not been precipitated earlier, it was because of a number of reasons. The movement was too insignificant to attract the notice of Babar and Hamayun, who were preoccupied with the consolidation of their empire. On statement puts the numbers of instructed followers of Guru Ram Das as eighty-four only.^{25a} This is obviously an underestimate, but it does indicate the slow progress of the movement upto the end of Guru Ram Das's ministry. The number of Sikhs increased rapidly only in the time of Guru Arjan. Mohsin Fani says, 'In the time of Guru Arjan Mal their number became very large.'^{25b} Either the fact of Muslim converts to the Sikh faith did not come to the notice of Akbar, or he was too broadminded as he was himself engaged, in his own way, in encouraging liberal trends in the India body politic.

But, Jahangir held different views from those of his father. Jahangir wrote about Abul Fazzal: “for twoards the closely of my father’s reign, availing himself of the influence which by some means or other he had acquired, he so wrought upon the mind of his master, as to instil into him the belief that the seal and asylum of prophecy, to whom the devotion of a thousands lives such as mine would be a sacrifice too inadequate to speak of, was no more to be thought of than as an Arab of singular eloquence, and that the sacred inspirations invented by the ever blessed mohammad. Actuated by those reasons it was that I employed the man who killed Abul Fazal and brought his head to me, and for this it was that I incurred my father’s deep displeasure.^{25c} There were clear political motives of Jahangir for acting against the fifth Guru. But, his statement also leaves no doubt about his attitude towards deviations from the shariatic concepts and practics. ‘Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi had made the revival of ortodoxo something of a movement.’²⁶ Therefore, whith the accession of Jahangir to the throne, who ‘himself was inclined towards the purification of (Muslim) beliefs and practices.’²⁷ the situation changed radically. The stage was set for the potential confrontation to become open. It was an inevitable clash between two conflicting ideologies which was bound to erupt sooner or later. Rather, the events moved quite rapidly. Akbar died on October 17, 1605, and Guru Arjan was tortured to death in June, 1606.²⁸ Jahangir did not want merely to punish a person (Guru Arjan). He wanted to put a stop to what he regarded as a ‘vain affair’, the propagation of the Sikh ideology, which ‘had flourished for three or four generations’. It was a declared assault not only on an individual but on the Sikh movement as a whole which posed a direct political challenge to his theocratic state.

The Sikh Guru, including Guru Arjan, could not have been unaware of the consequences that would follow from the ideological line they were pursuing. Even the most ignorant subject of a Muslim state was expected to know it, because the penalty for apostasy was a much publicized feature of the Shariat. But, the Gurus were not prepared to forsake their ideology and the course that ideology dictated, whatever

the consequences. When asked to change certain hymns in the Guru Granth, Guru Arjan refused to erase or alter even an iota. He refused to embrace Islam, which was one of Jahangir's intentions as expressed by him. When sentenced by Jahangir, he refused to relent. He could have saved himself even by paying the fine in lieu of the death sentence, which was changed at the instance of Saint Mian Mir. I have is for the poor, the friendless and the stranger. If thou ask for money thou mayest take what I have; but if thou ask for it by way of fine I shall not give thou even a Kauri. And as to what thou hast said regarding the erasures of hymns in the Granth Sahib, I cannot erase or alter an iota. I am a worshipper of the Immortal God, the Supreme Soul of the world. There is no monarch save Him.²⁹ The last part of this address was a clear challenge to the sovereign authority of the Mughals. When Mian Mir, the famous Muslim Sufi saint of Lahore, came to see Guru Arjan, he found the Guru's body all blistered and suppurated. He offered to intercede with the Emperor on the Guru's behalf and asked him why he was undergoing that torture. The Guru replied, "I bear all this torture to set an example... The Gurutest of faith is the hour of misery. Without examples to guide, ordinary persons' minds quail in the midst of suffering. In the second place, if he, who possesseth power within him, defends not his religion by the open profession thereof, the man who possesseth no such powers will, when put to the torture, abjure his faith. The sin will light on the head of him who hath the power but showeth is not; and God will deem him an enemy of religion."³⁰

This statement of the Guru, and his reply to Jahangir, make the ideals, which inspired Guru Arjan to make the supreme sacrifice, quite clear. To Mian Mir he made it plain that he was suffering torture to set an example that religion must be defended by 'the open profession thereof.' Open profession of religion by Guru Arjan meant open defiance of the Shariatic law, which involved defiance of the Muslim State.

We have seen that the institution of Sacha Padshah, as opposed to the established ruling authority, had taken roots in the

Sikh Panth before Jahangir came to power. Toynbee notes that the predecessors of Guru Hargobind had already transformed the Sikh community 'from an embryonic church into an embryonic state.'^{30a} Gupta calls the Sikh organisation of Guru Arjan's time as a state within a state.³¹ He further initiated the steps that involved the Sikh movement in a direct political conflict with the rulers. Guru Arjan blessed Khusarau, a contestent to the throne against Jahangir, and helped him with money. This was direct political involvement. Not only was money give to Khausarau, but the Guru also applied Tilak on his forehead. The significance of all this was not lost on Jahangir. He wrote, 'He (Guru Arjan) discussed serveral matters with him (Khusrau) and made on his forehead a finger-mark in saffron, which in terms of Hindus is called Qashqa and is considered propitious.'³² A European contemporary of this event draws the same inference. 'The Guru congratulated him (Khusrau) for assuming sovereignty and applied three marks on his forehead. Although the Guru was a heathen, and the prince a Mussalman, yet he was glad in putting on the prince's forehead that pagan sign as a mark of good success in his enterprises...'³³

Guru Arjan must have sensed the momentum that the movement for the revival of Islam was gathering after Akbar. Its likely impact on the Sikh movement could not be missed. Not to defend his religion 'by the open profession thereof', he regarded as a sin. The Sikh movement was not yet ready, not politically conscious, to take up the challenge on its own. Therefore, instead of remaining on the defensive, Guru Arjan took the initiative in availing himself of the first opportunity that the rift in the royal camp oresented. According to Jahangir's own estimate, Khusrau had one hundred and twelve thousand horses on his side,³⁴ and thus stood a good chance of challenging Jahangir. Thus, while Jahangir clearly recongized the political character of the Guru's Sikh movement, some writers, who on principle bifurcate religion and politics, either invent apologies for the one political and military activities of the Gurus, or call them a deviation from the religious path.

1. Rehearsal

The martyrdom of Guru Arjan was a turning point in Sikh history.

It was clear that further pursuit of the Sikh mission demanded armed conflict with Mughal Authority. The initiative for this purpose was also taken by Guru Arjun. Before he left for Lahore, he knew what was in store for him. He appointed Hargobind as his successor.³⁵ He told MianMir that he was suffering torture to set an example that religion, as conceived by the Sikh Gurus, must be defended by the open profession thereof. This sacrifice was a necessary prelude to the armed struggle to come; because the spirit of the people, who had been rendered impotent by the caste ideology and cowed down by six centuries of tyrannical political domination, had to be roused. In order to leave no doubt of his intentions, he instructed, before his departure for Lahore, his son Hargobind that he would have to retaliate against the Turks (tyrants).³⁶ Guru Arjan, during the last moments of his life, again sent specific instructions to his successor, 'Let him sit fully armed on his throne and maintain an army to the best of his ability.'³⁷

It was customary for the former Gurus to wear Seli (a woolen cord) as an insignia of Gurship. On the very first occasion of his instalment as Guru, when Bhai Gurdas placed a Seli and a turban before him, Hargobind ordered that the Seli should be deposited in the treasure. "My Seli", he said "shall be a sword belt, and I shall wear my turban with a royal aigrette."³⁸ He girded himself with two swords, signifying Miri and Piri, i.e. one symbolizing temporal power and the other spiritual power.³⁹ On the ninth day of his succession, he issued an encyclical letter demanding an immediate gift of arms from his followers, and soon after laid the foundation of Akal Takht — the throne of God.⁴⁰ The Akal Takht was raised as a seat of temporal authority close to, but distinct from, the Hari Mandir (the Golden Temple). For the same purpose, he raised two flags in front of the Akal Takht. He told Bhai Budha: "In the Guru's house spiritual and worldly well-being shall be combined: the cauldron to supply the poor and the needy, and the scimitar to smite the oppressors."⁴¹

Four hundred warriors from Majha, Doaba and Malwa regions volunteered their services to the Guru. They said, 'We are poor, we have no money to offer, we place our lives at the disposal of the Guru.'⁴² Besides these, many more gathered

round him 'who were satisfied with two meals a day and a new uniform every half-year.'⁴³ He came to possess a stable of seven hundred horses, three hundred horsemen and sixty gunners.⁴⁴ He built a fort at Amritsar called Lohgarh or fortress of steel. Guru Hargobind fought as many as six battles against the Mughal authorities. At least one of these seems to have been a major engagement. As many as 7,000 Mughal troops under Mukhlis Khan were defeated near Amritsar.⁴⁵

2. The Period of armed truce

Indubhusan writes: 'He (Guru Hargobind) maintained peace with the Government as long as he could, but had no illusion regarding the outcome of the struggle if it did come after all and planned accordingly. This is why we find that he was never flustered and his equanimity was never disturbed, howsoever desperate the situation might be.'⁴⁶ Having fought six battles, Guru Hargobind retired to Kiratpur in the Punjab hills. Kiratpur lay in the territory of Raja Tara Chand, 'who had throne off his allegiance to Emperor Shah Jahan.'⁴⁷ The Guru had come to the conclusion that the movement was not yet ripe to bear the full weight of the Mughal might. But his struggle with the Mughal forces did serve an important purpose. To quote Indubhusan: 'But it is apparent that whatever might have been the immediate results of Guru Hargobind's military adventures, looked at from a wider standpoint, the Guru's victories were not as useless as they seem. These successes against innumerable odds could not but inspire the Sikhs with self-confidence and give them an exalted sense of their own worth. This consciousness of their own worth, arising out of their own trying experience, became, as we shall see later, a great national asset. Guru Hargobind demonstrated the possibility — the possibility of the Sikhs' openly assuming an attitude of defiance against the Mughal Government — and considerably prepared the way for the thorough reformation that they received in the hands of Guru Gobind Singh'.⁴⁸ Gupta writes: 'He (Guru Hargobind) certainly inaugurated a policy which was to lead the most downtrodden people slowly but assuredly to political and military advancement. The Guru created a revolution in the life of the Sikhs. Along with the recitation of hymns, they were taught the practical lesson

of Dharam Yudha or holy war... After all what is the use of such spirituality as would not inspire a person to resist the wrong with courage and boldness?"⁴⁹

The period, starting from the retreat of Guru Hargobind to Kiratpur and ending with the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh, may be called a period of armed truce for the Sikh movement. During it the Gurus never gave up their attitude of defiance to the Mughal Government.^{49a} Guru Teg Bahadur, inspite of the consequences that such a step by Guru Arjan had invited, converted Muslims to the sikh faith,^{49b} and his 'repeated injunctions to his followers that they should obey the bearer of his arrows show more of the kingly than of the priestly spirit.'⁵⁰ He had enlisted an army of horsemen and camel-drivers, made 'an encroachment on the royal prerogative of setting up karkhanas', and 'encouraged refractory amils, ajaradars, zamindars, munshis, mutsadis to take shelter in his darbar where he accorded them places of highest honour.' ("B'ad az inqayazi Mudat-I-madid w ahad-I-b'id hazaran hazar afwaj w laskhar az qisam-I-sawaran shutran waghera tamam asbab wkarkhanajat-I-salatin der khidmat-I-faizdarjat fraham w mujteme gardidand w, ilawah baran her kas ke mutmared w sarkash az qisam-I-amal w zamidar w ajaradar w diwan w mutsadi az taraf-I-arakin-I-saltanat mishud zat-I-wala sifat ra maman w maskan-I-khud ikhtiar sakhta der khidmat-I-faizdarjat musharaf migashat.").^{50a} But, the Gurus did not come into an open armed clash with it either. On the part of the Mughal Government, this armed truce was made possible, probably because it considered that the movement no longer posed a threat to its authority. It has also been suggested that the liberal-minded Dara Shikoh exercised a moderating influence on Shah Jahan.⁵¹ As to the Sikhs, it suited them not to precipitate the conflict just then. They had their own organisational problems. However, Guru Har Rai continued to maintain a force of two thousand two hundred mounted soldiers to meet any unforeseen contingency that might arise.⁵²

Certain major events in the period of the armed truce bear a close resemblance to the events that had taken place before the armed struggle with the Mughals started under Guru Hargobind. The resemblance is so close, indeed, that if the name of the participants

and the attendant circumstance could be omitted, the two sets of happenings would become almost indistinguishable. This is highly significant. It could happen only if the Sikh movement continued to follow a single set plan and the forces it had to encounter also retained their pattern.

The general policy of guru Har Rai was not to invite armed clash with the Government. But, when Dara Shikoh, who had been defeated by Aurangzeb, crossed Satluj at Rupar, Guru Har Rai joined him at the head of two thousand troops. The Guru accompanied Dara to Lahore, where Dara spent a month and a half in making preparations for war. "But Dara was utterly broken down in body and spirit", and "his despair infected his troops."⁵³ When the guru found that Dara had made up his mind to flee to Multan and then to Kandhar, he left his camp and returned to Kartarpur.

The consequences that followed Guru Arjan's blessing of Khussrau (A.D. 1606) could not have been lost upon Guru Har Rai. Yet, fiftytwo years later, Guru Har Rai took an even bloder step of joining Dara with his troops and encouraging him for about a month to make a military stand. There can be nodoubt that this was direct political involvement and against a party (Aurangzeb) who had hitherto been successful. The Guru took a calculated risk. It was in the fitness of things that the Guru should have helped Dara, whose chief fault in the eyes of the orthodox Muslims was his socalled apostasy. Dara's success would have helped the Sikh cause. In any case, there was a chance of fighting militarily the tyrannical state which the Guru felt should not be missed. Secondly, when Guru Arjan blessed Khussrau, the Sikh aspirations for political power were in a nascent state. These had reached only the stageof 'Sacha Padshah'. But, Guru Hargobind had openly set up Akal Takht, had raised two flags and had donned on his turban a plume, an insignia of royalty. In other words, he had set up a parallel government. Bhai Gurdas calls him the 'sovereign of this world and the next.'⁵⁴ When chided by Gherar for having made the Emperor his enemy, Guru Hargobind said clearly: 'I have only injured myself. Why take it to heart?' "The affairs of the Guru's house shall ultimately be adjusted and the Turks deprived of the empire.'⁵⁵

Bhai Mathura, one of the commanders of the Guru's forces in a battle, addressed his troops thus: '.... If you die, your death will be profitable, since you have give up your lives as an offering to the Guru, and will join the court of heaven; but if, on the other hand, you vanquish your enemies, the empire will be yours.'⁵⁶ Therefore, from the time of Guru Hargobind, there should equally be no doubt that in offering military help to Dara, Guru Har Rai was clear, firm and open about the political objectives of the Sikh movement. All this gives us a clear perspective for appreciating why Guru Arjan blessed Khussrau.

There is another significant episode of this period. Augangzeb summoned Guru Har Rai to his court at Delhi in order to explain his dealings with Dara Shikoh. Instead of going himself, the Guru sent his 11 year old son, Ram Rai. Ram Rai was asked in the court why the following verse of Guru Nanak spoke lightly of the Mussalmans: "The ashes of the Mussalman fall into the potter's clod; vessels and bricks are fashioned from them; they cry out as they burn." This hymn was in no way a reflection on Mussalmans. The part of the hymn that God alone knows whether it is better to be burnt or buried. But instead of explaining this, Ram Rai altered the original hymn. He substituted the word 'Beiman' (faithless) for 'Mussalman'. The Sikhs of Delhi lost no time in reporting Ram Rai's weakness to Guru Har Rai. The Guru decided atonce that Ram Rai was not a fit person to succeed him as a Guru. 'The Guruship', said the Guru, is like a tigress's milk which can be contained in a golden cut. Only he who is ready to devote his life thereto is worthy of it. Let Ram Rai not look at my face again. Let him abide with Aurangzeb and amass money at his court.'⁵⁷

Guru Arjan had refused to alter or erase even an iota of the hymns in the Guru Granth when asked by Jahangir to do so. The reaction of Guru Har Rai was no different. He never saw the face of Ram Rai again. There could be no compromise, not even a hint of compromise, on ideological issues. This episode reveals how firm and

emphatic were the Gurus in matters of principle and in training their people in a life of truth, courage and boldness.

The third great event in the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur. It took place on November 10, 1675, about sixty-nine years after that of guru Arjan. Yet, how close is the resemblance between the causes that led to these martyrdoms and the response to them. By this time, Aurangzeb's anti-Hindu policy was in full swing. He cast away all caution to the winds and proceeded in such an open manner that it offended the susceptibilities of even the loyal Rajputs. Conversion to Islam was not only encouraged but also enforced. In Kashmir, Aurangzeb's viceroy, Sher Afghan Khan, carried out mass conversions to Islam and massacred those who resisted. Latif in his history says: "The Emperor had in those days thrown hundreds of Brahmins in Jail in the hope that, if they first embraced the religion of the Prophet, the rest of the Hindus would readily follow their example."⁵⁸ It was at this juncture that some of the Kashmiri Pandits sought Guru Teg Bahadur's help,^{58a} because people had come to look up to him as the one person who could be expected to take a bold stand against the Mughal state.^{58b} The Guru was very much moved to hear their tale and was in a pensive mood when his son, Govind Rai, who was only nine years old, happened to come there. The son asked the father what made him so engrossed in thought. The Guru replied, 'there is a serious crisis. It can be resolved if some holy person sacrifices his life.'⁵⁹ On this Gobind Rai remarked, 'for that purpose who is more worthy than thou...?'"⁶⁰ At this the Guru told the Kashmiri Pandits to convey it to the Governor of Kashmir that if Guru Teg Bahadur embraced Islam they would follow suit. Evidently, the Pandits informed the governor who conveyed the message to Aurangzeb. Soon after it, the Gur was summoned to Delhi. He was asked to show a miracle. The Guru tied a piece of paper around his neck and declared that the sword would not be able to pierce it. When the executioner made the fatal blow, the Guru's head was severed from the body. No the paper was found written, "Sees diya, Sirar na diya", meaning that he had given his head but not his resolve.⁶¹

Guru Arjan had sacrificed himself to defend religion in the

Guru's sense of the word. The later Gurus continued to convert Muslims to the Sikh faith despite the consequences which this policy had invited, according Jahangir's own version, on Guru Arjan. Guru Teg Bahadur's martyrdom was also self-invited. Haqiqat states that Emperor Aurangzeb himself had written to the Guru: "If, as previously, like the poor Nanakpanthis faqirs, you live peacefully in a corner, no harm will befall you. On the contrary, alms, suitable for your maintenance in the style of faqirs, would be given to you from the state treasury... But the horses and arms, and equipment of your retinue that you have gathered in your place of worship, must be removed."⁶² 'Accordingly, the faudar of Sirhind intimated this order (to Teg Bahadur). Before the proud and virile disciple who had assembled there, Teg Bahadur said definitely: "We are faqirs; what God has given us, why should we return."⁶³ The Guru thus not only defied Aurangzeb's order, he, instead invited martyrdom to save the oppressed Kashmiri Pandits. No more clear independent evidence of the Gurus' ideological line than the one provided by Haqiqat is needed. Had the guru been content to pursue the conventional practice of religion, the way was left open to him by Aurangzeb. In fact, the same Emperor had conferred a jagir on Ram Rai who had chosen the path of least resistance. But, Guru Teg Bahadur's resolved to resist religious dictation and political oppression was an integral part of the Gurus' view of religion. Otherwise, there was no point in his publicly refusing to disarm, because this would be an open defiance of any state. Guru Gobind Singh writes, "He (Guru Teg Bahadur) suffered martyrdom for the sake of his religion; He gave his head but swerved not from his determination."⁶⁴ The same Guru leaves no doubt about the Sikh view of religion, when he describes that God commanded him with a mission:

"I have cherished thee as My son,
and created thee to extend my religion"⁶⁵

Thus, under god's command,

"I assumed birth for the purpose
of spreading the faith, saving the saints,

And extirpating all tyrants.”⁶⁶

Before his martyrdom, Guru Arjan had instructed Guru Hargobind ‘Let him sit fully armed on his throne and maintain an army to the best of his ability’. And, Guru Gobind Singh proceeded to create the militant Khalsa after the death of Guru Teg Bahadur.

5. Continuity of the Sikh Mission

We have seen above that there were similar responses to identical situations and crises by different Gurus in different periods of history. This is in itself a clear indication of the continuity of the Sikh mission. Also, we have the direct evidence of the Guru Granth that the first five Gurus, i.e. upto the time of its compilation, were one in spirit, though they had different bodily forms.⁶⁷ Bhai Gurdas writes that all the six Gurus were one in spirit. “Arjan changed his body and transformed himself into Hargobind.”⁶⁸ We have the independent evidence of Muhsin Fani that the Sikhs ‘believe that with a mere change of name, Nanak the first became Nanak the second, and so on to the fifth, in the person of Arjan Mal’.^{68a} Similarly, Guru Gobind Singh says :

“He (Nanak) established religion in the Kali age,...

Nanak assumed the body of Angad,

Afterwards Nanak was called Amar Das,

As one lamp is lit from another

And Amar Das became Ram Das,

The pious saw this, but not the fools,

Who thought them all distinct,

But some rare persons recognized that they were all one.

They who understood this obtained perfection —

Without understanding (this) perfection cannot be obtained.”⁶⁹

There cannot be more authentic evidence than the one recorded in the Guru Granth and by Guru Gobind Singh. It lays down in unambiguous language that all the Gurus were inspired by the same unified thesis and mission. Not only that. Guru Gobind Singh

emphasizes that, without the acceptance of this view, there can be no true understanding of the Sikh path.⁷⁰

Guru Hargobind Singh was eleven years old when he discarded the Seli, armed himself and his followers, and founded the Akal Takht. He did this despite the misgivings in the Sikh ranks and opposition from the Masands. The Masands were an important link in the Sikh organisation and a channel of communication between the Gurus and the Sikhs. The Masands prevailed upon the guru's mother to convey it to the Guru that he had deviated from the path of Guru Nanak and had embarked upon a risky course involving conflict with the authorities. Bhai Gurdas has written a full stanza depicting doubts among the Sikh.⁷¹ 'Bhai Budha, too, on seeing the young Guru in military harness 'mildly remonstrated with him.'⁷² Guru Arjan had told Hargobind to regard Bhai Budha as the image of Guru Nanak and bade him touch his feet.⁷³ Guru Hargobind respected him to much that on a later occasion, when he was Guru, he again placed his head at the feet of Bhai Budha. But when it came to the basic principles of policy, he did not accept Bhai Budha's or any one else's advice. The guru persisted single-handed and single-mindedly in the policy of militarization he had embarked upon. Bhai Gurdas wrote that the Guru carried an 'unbearable burden.'⁷⁴ , because he could not divulge prematurely his full plans. The firmness of the Guru's resolve speaks clearly of the Guru's conviction that he was carrying out thereby God's mission.

In any case, the continuity of the Guru's mission is clear. The naming of the new seat of temporal authority as Akal Takht is very significant. It was God's throne. Guru Nanak had told Daulat Khan Lodi that he recognized no authority other than that of God.⁷⁵ Guru Arjan had declared, that he was "a worshipper of the Immortal Soul... There is no monarch save Him."⁷⁶ Guru Hargobind established the throne of that Immortal Authority (Akal) as Akal Takht. Guru Nanak had clearly described the political conditions prevailing during his time as the 'dark night of falsehood:

"This age is a knife, kings are butchers; justice hath taken wings and fled.

In this completely dark night of falsehood the moon of truth is never seen to rise.”⁷⁷

Guru Arjan, when required by emperor Jahangir to explain his conduct, declared: “my main object is the spread of truth and the destruction of falsehood; and if, in pursuance of this object, this perishable body must depart, I shall account it a great good fortune.”⁷⁸ As Guru Nanak regarded the situation created by the butcher kings ‘dark night of falsehood’, and as the same mission was followed by all the Gurus, the fight against ‘butcher kings’ was, therefore, as much a part of Guru Arjan’s main objective of ‘destroying falsehood’ as his fight against religious dictation. Guru Hargobind proceeded to arm the Panth for destroying ‘falsehood’ with the help of arms in order ‘to lighten the burden of the earth.’⁷⁹ Bhai Gurdas describes Guru Hargobind as ‘Destroyer of armies, a great warrior’, and links these attributes to his mission of beneficence and help others.⁸⁰ The representation of Guru Arjan as Sacha Padshah was given a very concrete form when Guru Hargobind ascended the Akal Takht, donned a plume on his turban and raised aloft two flags before the Akal Takht. Bhai Gurdas leaves no doubt on this point. He calls Guru Hargobind ‘sovereign of this world and also of the next.’⁸¹ We shall find the same continuity of the mission in the creation of the Khalsa of God (Waheguru ji ka Khalsa) by Guru Gobind Singh.

CHAPTER XIV

The Khalsa

The third objective of the Sikh movement was to capture political power for a plebian mission. Khalsa was the instrument created and used both to overthrow the Mughals and to capture political power for achieving plebian objectives. The significance of Khalsa, and the role it played in the revolutionary struggle, are of the highest importance, because the Khalsa was the climax of the Sikh movement.

1. Revolutionary Mission Enshrined

Describing the attributes of God, Guru Gobind Singh says, “Thou bestowest happiness on the good, Thou terrifiest the evil, Thou scatterest sinners, I seek Thy protection.”¹ “God ever cherisheth the poor; saveth saints, and destroyeth enemies.”² He speaks of God as “Compassionate to the poor, and Cherished of the lowly.”³ Guru Nanak identifies himself with “the lowliest of the lowly, the lowest of the low-born..., for, where the weak are cared for, Thy Mercy is showered.”⁴ Thus, ‘cherishing the poor’ and ‘destroying the tyrant’ are, according to Sikhism, God’s own mission. In the Guru’s own words, “his father (Guru Teg Bahadur) suffered martyrdom for the sake of religion.” It was in the pursuance of His mission that God sent Guru Gobind Singh to this world. In the Guru’s own words :

“Go and spread my religion there,
And restrain the world from senseless acts.”^{4a}

It has been seen in a previous chapter how Guru Gobind Singh bestowed sovereignty on the Khalsa for plebian objectives. This was

how this Sikh revolutionary mission was consecrated. It was God's own mission.

2. Wahi Guru Ji Ka Khalsa

Wahe Guru ji ka Khalsa

Wahe Guru ji ki Fateh

It means, "The Khalsa belongs to God, and so does Victory belong to Him'. When Guru Gobind Singh conferred leadership on the Khalsa, he ended his address with this expression. It became a motto of the Khalsa. It is repeated on all occasions and ceremony, and as a form of daily greetings among the Singhs. Guru Nanak had told Daulat Khan Lodhi that he recognised no other authority than that of God. Guru Arjan had declared, I am a worshipper of the Immortal God... There is no monarch save Him.' Guru Gobind Singh said in his hymn: 'Since I have embraced Thy feet, I have paid regard to none besides.'⁵ The same lesson was impressed on the mind of the Khalsa by the repeated expression of the above motto. The Khalsa owed allegiance to God and to none-else. In its social implications, it meant loyalty only to the Khalsa mission which had been sanctified by God himself. Forster narrates a personal experience. Once he travelled in the company of a Sikh horseman for some days. His answer, when⁶ I asked him very respectfully in whose service he was retained, seemed strikingly characteristic of what I conceive to be the disposition of the Nation. He said, in a tone of voice and with a countenance which glowed and was keenly animated by the warm spirit of liberty and independence, that he disclaimed no earthly Master, and he was the servant only of his Prophet.'⁶ This is a glimpse of the Khalsa spirit as it had survived even in the post-revolutionary period. This motto also generated a spirit of everlasting optimism and humility-optimism because the revolutionary cause, being God's cause, was bound to succeed sooner or later; and humility because all victory was God's Victory and by His Grace. It involved no credit for the participant.

3. Open declaration of Revolution

When the head of Guru Teg Bahadur was brought to Guru Gobind Singh at Anadpur, he asked, how many Sikhs had sacrificed themselves along with Guru Teg Bahadur? He was told only two Sikhs sacrificed themselves. The Guru remarked, 'But the Sikhs are many in number?' The answer given was, 'All turned their back to the faith. All slipped back in the populace. There was no distinguishing mark for a Sikh to prevent that happening.' This provoked the guru to say, 'I shall assign such distinguishing marks to the Sikhs that a Sikh would be recognizable even among thousands.'⁷ Guru Gobind Singh proceeded to create the Khalsa, an armed body of revolutionaries, who were to carry out the revolution 'by the open profession thereof.' On being baptized, i.e. on being initiated as a member of the Khalsa, a Sikh became a Singh. A Singh had to carry fixed distinguishing marks, especially hair, which he could not discard so long as he wanted to remain a Singh. So he was recognizable even among thousands, by friends and foes alike. Thus each and every Singh was made not only an instrument of the declared revolution, but also its standard bearer.

It was in 1675 AD that the Guru expressed his intention of assigning distinguishing marks to the Sikhs. He gave it a practical shape, by creating the Khalsa, in 1699, 24 years later. This shows a long-term plan and preparation. Guru Hargobind's battles had not been in vain. These inspired 'the Sikhs with self-confidence and gave them an exalted sense of their own worth.' Guru Har Rai and Guru Teg Bahadur had kept regular forces, but that remained primarily a period of truce. And, there was not a radical change in the political situation. Aurangzeb confronted the non-Muslims with an undisguised religious and political challenge. He started undermining even the position of his loyal Rajput allies. This challenge could be met only by a direct confrontation and by pitching against the power of the state the power of the masses. Guru Gobind Singh, therefore, made an open declaration of revolution and started arming the general body of the Panth^{7a} with a view to creating a large force of revolutionaries. As Bhangu has rightly put it, the Guru 'first increased the number of the Khalsa, and then started the revolution.'⁸

4. Khalsa as an instrument of Revolution

Guru Gobind Singh invited the hill Rajas to join him in his struggle against the Mughals. For a short time, he even succeeded in persuading some of them to make common cause against Mughal rulers. But, the attitude of the hill chiefs was not consistent. They were guided primarily by their feudal interests and made war or peace with the Mughals accordingly. Another basic point of difference was that they were governed by caste considerations. When invited by the Guru, they refused even to entertain the idea of working side by side with the low caste followers of the guru. Had the Guru been guided by the consideration of only meeting the Mughal challenge, he might have come to terms with the hill Rajas. But he did not. This is very significant. His basic objective was to raise the level of the poor and the downtrodden. He wanted these very people to capture political power for themselves. For that end, the Guru had to embark upon his project from humble beginnings. He made arrows with his own hands⁹ and trained people who had been denied the use of arms by the caste ideology. He did not follow the easier course of depending upon the hill chiefs who had arms and martial tradition. For this would have been at the cost of his fundamental religious and social principles and objectives.

Guru Gobind Singh gathered together the Sikhs and gave them the call, 'Take up arms and defeat the Turks (Mughals).' He devised the plan for baptism of the Khalsa. On the annual Baisakhi gathering of the Sikhs, the Guru came out of the tent with a drawn sword in his hand and demanded from the congregation the head of a Sikh for sacrifice. There was great consternation but one Sikh got up and offered himself to the Guru. The Guru took him inside the tent. Soon after he came out with a blood-stained sword in his hand and again demanded a second head. This time the consternation was greater than before, but undaunted, another Sikh offered himself. Thrice again the Guru made the same demand. Every time a Sikh offered himself. This showed that the community had attained the level when it was ready to stake its all for the cause. Finally, the Guru brought out from the tent the Five Pyaras (Beloved Ones) hale and hearty. First he baptised them and then got himself baptised by them. Thus was baptised the Khalsa, ready for the mission. The Guru said:

They would destroy the (established) rule,
 And establish their own everywhere...
 Khalsa would become the image of God,
 With His own attributes.

They would acknowledge no authority other than that of the True Lord.’¹⁰

Gursobha testifies that ‘The Khalsa is created to destroy the evil-doer (‘Asur’ and ‘durjan’).¹¹ Koer Singh writes that after the baptism ceremony, the Guru gave instruction to the following effect: ‘Destroy the Mughal forces... (and you) rule for ever.’¹² The later Sikh literature records the same tradition. ‘Khalsa is one who fights in the front line... Khalsa is one who protects the poor. Khslas is one who crushes the tyrant (‘dushat’).¹³ ‘Where the (Singhs) fight the Turks for upholding Dharma and the Sikh ideals and to help others, there my presence will be felt among the Sikhs’.¹⁴ Khalsa is the army of God’.¹⁵

It was ordered: “You should now wear weapons, and worship iron and love it, because this iron will lead you to a high postion.”^{15a}

Guru Gobind Singh addressed his two sons at the battle of Chamkaur: ‘My sons, you are dear to me. You are born to destroy the Turks (tyrants). Only if you sacrifice yourselves in the battle can the tyrants be eliminated. There can be no better opportunity than the present one. Both of you go and join the battle.’¹⁶ And, when his eldest son died fighting their, the Guru said, ‘Today he has become the chosen Khalsa in God’s court.’¹⁷ Thus, to sacrifice one-self for the revolutionary cause was the fulfilment of the Khalsa ideal and it was sanctified by religion.

The acceptance of Khalsa ideology naturally meant becoming whole-time revolutionaries. An important part of the Sikh discipline was the dedication of one’s all — body, soul and belongings (Tan, Man, Dhan) — to the Guru or God. “By dedicating body, mind and possessions to the Guru and abiding by His Will does one reach God.”¹⁸ This ideal demanded extreme self-sacrifice. The Guru said, “As the elephant suffers the goad, and the anvil the stoke of the smith, so should one surrender one’s body and mind to the service (of God).”¹⁹ When Banda expressed his desire to become a disciple of Guru Gobind

Singh, the Guru cautioned him that, in order to become a Sikh, he would have to surrender and stake everything for the mission.”²⁰ To regard one’s body, soul and possessions as belonging to the Guru or God, was the Sikh way of creating a commune. With the militarization of the Sikh movement, this ideal was orientated towards dedication of one’s all to the revolutionary cause. The Khalsa is God’s one (Wahiguru ji ka Khalsa). Therefore, dedication of oneself to the Khalsa was dedication to God. The Sikh’s dedication of body, soul and possession, to be Khalsa has to be complete. Guru Gobind Singh has himself made this point explicit. “All the wealth of my house with soul and body is for them (Khalsa).”²¹ ‘Khalsa is my own image; I abide in the Khalsa is my body and life; Khalsa is the life of my life; I belong to the Khalsa and the Khalsa belongs to me; the way the ocean and drop are one.’²²

Thousands of Sikhs lived upto this standard. Even at a very late stage of the struggle, those who joined the Khalsa Dal (an organisation of combatant volunteers) had, according to the demands of the mission, to cut off virtually all their connections with their families. Those who, without permission, visited their families even for some urgent reason, had to pay the prescribed penalty.²³ When the Khalsa Dal was reorganised into five divisions (Jathas), one of these divisions was of Shaheeds, viz., those who had dedicated themselves completely to the revolutionary cause and had vowed not to shirk martyrdom when necessary. The Nihangs and Akalis were quite sizeable in numbers. They played a notable part in Sikh history. Nihangs or Akalis, like the Shaheeds, were those volunteers who had dedicated their lives to the armed service of the Panth. May be, they were a part, or an offshoot of the shaheeds. They cut off for life all the worldly connections, spent their entire lives in the Jathas, remained always armed to the teeth and were ever ready to lay down their lives for the Panth. They were to the Sikhs what the Jannesears were to the Turks, with the difference that the Nihangs or Akalis were honorary volunteers and not organised or paid by the state. The Nihangs were a dedicated and inspired lot, highly conscious of the Sikh mission and its revolutionary ideals. Theirs was an armed commune and continues to be so to this day. In other words, they institutionlized

the ideal of dedicating. “Tan, Man, Dhan’ to the Sikh revolutionary cause. It was for this reason that they were held in high esteem in the Panth. They were at one time its conscience keepers. When the movement entered its lean period and split up into different fighting corporations (Misals), one of the Misals was of the Shaheeds. They held not territory of their own, and were provided food and shelter by the Panth. The Shaheeds or Akalis provided the rallying point for the Misals to coordinate in order to meet a common danger to the Panth. At such a time, the resolution (Gurmatta) to meet such an eventuality (e.g. at the time of threatened danger from Abdali’s invasion) would be sponsored by the Akalis. All the Misals would honour the resolution.²⁴ Even Ranjit Singh respected them and was afraid of offending the Akalis. They were the dominating factor in the Khalsa army committees.^{24a} Scott compares the Akalis with Cromwell’s Ironsides. ‘The Akalis would represent the ‘Fifth Monarchy Men’, stern and uncompromising, firmly believing in the righteousness of their cause, insisting on the right to equality for all, guided by the decisions of the Panch, or Committee of five, than by their nominal leaders, and watching those leaders with the jealous eyes lest they should assume absolute power.’²⁵

5. As Custodian of Ethical Values

The Sikh movement, as already pointed out, had a two-pronged approach. It aimed at raising man above his ego-centredness and thus produces an ideal man, and it wanted to change the social and political environment, which hindered such a development. Guru Gobind Singh, no doubt, bestowed political sovereignty on the Khalsa, but it was to be the Khalsa of his definition. The Guru had said that ‘Khalsa was his own image... his perfect Guru.’²⁶ Accordingly, great emphasis was laid on the maintenance of the ethical standards set for the Khalsa. ‘He who shuns the company of the five evils, loves to associate with noble men, owns Dharma and compassion, gives up ambition;... He is the Khalsa of the Waheguru.’²⁷ One day before his death, when the Sikhs asked Guru Gobind Singh as to who was to be his successor, he replied :

‘Khalsa is my image, I abide in the Khalsa;

From beginning to end, I reveal myself in the Khalsa.’²⁸

Bhai Nand Lal, a close associate of Guru Gobind Singh, writes:

‘Khalsa is one who does not speak ill of others;
 Khalsa is one who fights in the front ranks.
 Khalsa is one who conquers the five evils;
 Khalsas is one who destroys doubt.
 Khalsa is one who gives up ego;
 Khalsa is one who keeps away from woman, not his wife;
 Khalsa is one who looks upon all as his own;
 Khalsa is one who attunes himself with God.’²⁹

In the Rehatnama of Bhai Prahlaad Singh, it is written, ‘He who lives up to the Sikh ideals, he alone is my Sikh.’³⁰ Guru Gobind Singh’s uncle Kirpal Singh and some other leading Sikhs expressed their concern to the Guru that it would not be possible to maintain the sense of discrimination between good and evil in the revolutionary struggle he wanted to initiate. And, if that discrimination is lost, the Sikh ideals would be nowhere. The Guru’s reply was that the true Sikhs would not lose that discrimination; only those would go astray who join the revolution from ulterior motives.³¹ In fact, in the literature of the revolutionary period, there is great emphasis on the observance of the ethical values by the Khalsa. For his overall development, the Sikh was asked both to maintain the highest moral standards and to faithfully pursue the socio-political objectives of the Khalsa.

Sikhism regards Haumen (ego or individualism) as the greatest human failing. It is this which leads to acts of encroachment and aggression. It is for this reason that they have laid great stress on the elimination of individualism. The Sikh ideal is : “Neither frighten anyone, nor fear of anyone.”³² “The Gurmukh is powerful, yet humble in spirit.”³³ The sublimation of ego was not only a theological ideal, but also a social ideal of Sikhism.

The Gurus had all along been identifying themselves with the Sikhs or the Sikh Panth. The tenth Guru made it clear that the corporate movement was of greater significance than any individual, howsoever highly placed he may be. All his achievements, he says, he owed to the

Khalsa. "Through their favour I am exalted, otherwise there are millions of ordinary men like myself."³⁴

When the so-called Nawabi was offered to Kapur Singh, a humble person who did service at the daily gathering, he said he would accept it only after it was touched to the feet of five Singhs.³⁵ This episode leads to four inferences. That honour was considered by the Khalsa as the reward of humble service. This was the reason for selecting Kapur Singh. Secondly, there was, till then, no craving for personal power. That is why Nawabi was acceptable to no one and had to be imposed by the Khalsa on unwilling Kapur Singh. Thirdly, the objective was not personal power (Nawabi), but to be the humble servant of the Khalsa, from which everyone drew his strength. Fourthly, it showed that all power vested in the corporate body, the Khalsa.

When the first mud fort of the Khalsa was built, 'the Singhs were there own brick-layers and labourers; (they) themselves grinded corn and prepared food; the more one served, the bigger the leaders he was called. Whosoever put in more labour, blessed was the life of that Singh. It was said that nobody bore ill will to another; nobody gave air to his personal difficulties.'^{35a}

6. Complete Break with the Social Past

It was the basic inequity of the caste society that the Gurus wanted to supplant. However, the sole recruiting ground for the Sikh movement was the caste society. The Gurus had hitherto furthered the objectives of their movement in a cautious manner so as not to break this life-line. But, the Khalsa had to be the instrument of capturing political power for a plebian mission. It was, therefore, necessary that the membership of the Khalsa should be restricted to those who were not only alive to the objectives of the movement, but were also willing to make major sacrifices for it. At the time of baptism ceremony, each entrant to the brotherhood for the Khalsa gained five freedoms; freedom from the shackles of (a) earlier religions, (b) earlier Karmas (deeds), (c) caste, clan and race, (d) earlier taboos and customs, and (e) superstitions, rituals, etc.³⁶ these freedoms ensured the complete severance of the Khalsa from the caste society. Those who were baptised into the Khalsa were also said to be reborn. But, unlike the

Upananya ceremony, they were not re-born into Aryan-hood. They were re-born because, by being baptised, they shed off all stigmas attached to them or their status by the caste society. Not only that; there became a clear distinction between Singhs and Sikhs. Those Sikhs who did not become Singhs, i.e. did not join the Khalsa, came to be know as Sahejdhari Sikhs. This term is meaningful. These Sahejdharis were in a way in the evolutionary process of becoming Singhs. They had accepted the main ideology of Sikhism, but were for some reason or other not ready to follow it to its logical end.

At the time of the creation of the Khalsa, there was a rift on ideological grounds all along the line in the Sikh ranks. Some people expressed their inability to forego traditional usages and customs. But this cleavage did not sever the life-line of the movement from its source of recruitment. The Sahejdhari Sikhs served as a buffer to absorb the shock which the creation of the Khalsa was bound to cause to the caste society. Also, by being baptised at the hands of the Sudras (Panj Pyaras), the Guru had symbolically made them his Guru. This was unthinkable for the caste ideology and the caste society. Many Sikhs drawn from the higher castes dissociated themselves from the movement, 'Khatris and Brahmins remained aloof.'³⁷ This second cleavage shows clearly that the creation of the Khalsa meant a complete break with the caste society. Those who could not go whole hog with the anti-caste drive of the movement parted company or remained as Sahejdhari Sikhs.

7. Leadership

The leadership of a movement has always an important bearing in determining the direction of the movement. The way the question of the leadership of the Khalsa was tackled is a demonstration that Guru Gobind Singh wanted to preserve the plebian character of the movement.

Writing about the significance of the initiation (baptism) ceremony of the Khalsa, Gokal Chand Narang state : 'Of the five who offered their heads, one was a Khatri, all the rest being so-called Sudras. But the Guru called them Panj Pyaras, or the Beloved five, and baptised them after the manner he had introduced for initiation into the brotherhood. He enjoined the same duties upon them, gave

them the same privileges, and as a token of newly acquired brotherhood, all of them dined together.

The Guru's views of democratic equality were much more advanced than the mere equality among his followers could satisfy. In his system, there were no place even for the privileges of the chief or the leader. No leader, he believed, could be fit to lead unless he was elected or accepted by the followers. History shows that individuals classes enjoying a religious or sacerdotal superiority have been only too loth to forego even a particle of their privileges. But the Guru, though regarded by his faithful followers as the greatest of prophets, was made of a different stuff, and had too much political insight to stand on an exclusive eminence apart from his followers. Therefore, when he had initiated his first five disciples, his beloved five, he was initiated by them in turn, taking the same vows as they had done, and claiming no higher privileges than those he allowed them. Soon after he called a meeting of all his followers and announced his new doctrine to them.'³⁸

The Guru did this not only because he 'was made of a different stuff', but also because he wanted to ensure that the leadership of the movement remained in the hands of the Khalsa who had a plebian mission. The Beloved five (of whom four were Sudras) were made the nucleus of the leadership of the Khalsa, and this was done when the Guru's sons were alive. More than that, by accepting initiation at the hands of the Beloved five, he accepted them as his own leaders. Again, at the battle of Chamkaur, when the Sikhs requested him to leave the place so that he might reorganise the Khalsa, 'the Guru circumabulated them three times, laid his plume and crest in front of them offered them his arms and cried out, 'Sri Waheguru ji ka Khalsa! Sri Waheguru ji ki Fateh.'

The fact that the leadership of the movement devolved on the Khalsa Panth as a whole became an article of living faith with the Sikhs. In this connection, the episode of Banda's nomination as leader and his subsequent parting of company with the Khalsa is very illustrative. The Khalsa agreed to follow Banda only on the condition that he would not aspire to sovereignty.³⁹ The Guru instructed Banda to abide by the Khalsa and appointed select Sikhs as his advisers.⁴⁰

After his military successes, Banda aspired to become Guru and a sovereign. The Tat Khalsa (the genuine Khalsa) parted company with him and his followers, because the Guru had given.

‘Banda service and not sovereignty;
The sovereignty had been given to the Panth by
the Guru (Sacha Padshah) himself.’⁴¹

After Banda, Kapur Singh was elected as the leader of the Khalsa. He was elected because he was, in those days, engaged in doing the humble services like fanning the daily congregations of the Khalsa. Kapur Singh showed his preference for the humble service he was engaged in and entreated that he should be spared the honour that was being conferred upon him. But, the leadership was virtually imposed upon him. Kapur Singh, on becoming the leader, did nothing without consulting the Khalsa.

‘Showed great respect towards the Singhs;
Did nothing without taking the Panth into confidence.
(He) engaged himself in humble service with even greater
vigour;
Great humility came to his mind.’⁴²

With the end of Kapur Singh’s era, the revolutionary spirit started waning. His successor was Jassa Singh ‘Kalal’, who was accepted leader by the Khalsa on the advice of Kapur Singh. Jassa Singh had very humble beginnings. ‘He joined the Panth as a beggar and became its Patshah.’⁴³ Here ‘Patshah’ does not mean sovereign ruler; it means only a supreme leader. Jassa Singh struck coin in his own name when the Khalsa conquered Lahore for the first time. This was so much against the spirit of collective leadership of the Khalsa, that a special convention was held, where it was decided to recall that coin from circulation.⁴⁴ In its place, another coin struck in the name of the Guru was substituted. Polier (1780) observed, ‘As for the Government of the Siques, it is properly an aristocracy, in which no pre-eminence is allowed except that which power and force naturally gives; otherwise all the chiefs, great and small, and even the

poorest and most abject Siques, look on themselves as perfectly equal in all the public concerns and in the greatest Council or Goormatta of the nation, held annually either at Ambarsar, Lahore or some other place. Everything is decided by the plurality of votes taken indifferently from all who choose to be present at it.'⁴⁵ Forest also gives a similar account. 'An equality of rank is maintained in their civil society, which no class of men, however wealthy or powerful, is suffered to break down. At the periods when general council of the nation were convened, which consisted of the army of large, every members had the privilege of delivering his opinion, and the majority, it is said, decided on the subject in debate'.^{45a} This shows how strong the original spirit of equality and fraternization of the Sikh revolution must have been so that it could still reveal its glimpses even in the post-Khalsa period.

The leadership of the collective Khalsa, or the Panth, did not mean that any majority decision taken by it had an automatic religious sanctity. The supreme consideration was that such decisions had to conform to the Sikh ideals. So long as the Gurus were there, they saw to it that there was no deviation from the Sikh principles. When the Sikhs of Lahore proposed to pay the fine on his behalf, Guru Arjan strongly turned down the proposal. Similarly, Guru Gobind Singh brushed aside the views of those Sikhs who advised him to make peace with Aurangzeb. It was the Sikh principles which were to be supreme. The Guruship was conferred on Guru Granth and leadership on the collective Panth. These steps were taken to ensure that, after the Gurus, the collective leadership of only those who were ideologically oriented prevailed.

8. Its Role

The creation of the Khalsa was not an idle dream. The Khalsa proved its mettle by passing through the ordeal of fire. It is unnecessary to go into details of the struggle because these are writ large on the pages of Sikh history. But, it is relevant to emphasize the revolutionary mission which inspired and sustained the movement during its critical periods.

The Khalsa had to carry on its armed conflict all along in the heart and the citadel of the Mughal empire. It had none of the

advantages of terrain and a secure base that the Marathas had. It had no forts. The only fortification, if this could be called a fort at all, which Guru Gobind Singh had built at Anandpur, was lost to the movement for ever in the last battle there. After that, not to speak of a base or a fort, the Khalsa had not a foothold or land which it could call its own. It appeared from and disappeared into the villages, hideouts, jungles, and areas which were under the firm control of the governors of Sirhind and Lahore. This area was close to Delhi and was on the life-line of the Mughal empire which connected its capital with Kabul. The Rajputs and the Marathas had found to their cost that it was not feasible to fight the Mughal might in the plains. Bhao, The Maratha Commander in the battle of Panipat, 'judged himself to be unequal to cope with the Shah in the open field'.⁴⁶ The Khalsa had no alternative. Moreover, the area had a large Muslim population whose hostility to the movement was very natural.

The Sikh movement was virtually crushed a number of times.^{46a} It suffered many serious reverses. But each time, like the proverbial phoenix, it rose from its ashes. The first setback took place when Guru Gobind Singh had to leave Anandpur, Chamkaur and finally Mukatsar. But, within an year and a half of the Guru's death, the Khalsa under Banda had conquered Sirhind and humbled the government of Lahore. It was a miracle wrought. The Guru had sent messages to the Singhs to join Banda in his campaign. He had instructed Banda especially to put the revolutionaries from Majha in the forefront of the struggle.⁴⁷ Supreme sacrifices were made by the Khalsa. Guru Gobind Singh was no more, but the 'Promethean fire' that he had rekindled was all ablaze.

The second occasion, when the Sikh movement was practically crushed, was when Banda was defeated, captured and executed. It may not be out of place to point out that Banda's defeat was in no small measure due to the Tat Khalsa having parted company with him. The Khalsa forces had already been weakened by this split in their ranks. The defeat of Banda was the final blow and the signal for a general persecution of the Singhs by the Mughal administration. The Khalsa was no longer in a position to take the field against the

Mughals. Under the relentless persecution launched by Emperor Farrukh Siyar they were forced to split into small bands. This was the beginning of the heroic guerilla warfare.

The time of the guerilla struggle was the most trying for the movement. We would quote Hari Ram Gupta rather extensively. "The Emperor then issued a general edict which was applicable to all parts of the empire. According to it, every Sikh wherever seen was to be immediately arrested. He was to be offered only one alternative, either Islam or sword. It was to be executed there and then without any hesitation or loss of time. A schedule of valuable rewards was proclaimed. For every Sikh head Rs. 25 was to be given, and for a Sikh captive a sum of Rs. 100/- was to be awarded".⁴⁸

"The emperor's orders were strictly obeyed. The Governors of Sarhind, Lahore and Jammu tried to surpass one another in persecution of the Sikhs in order to win the goodwill of Farrukh Siyar. Abdul Samad was entrusted with the supervision of this work. They took written undertaking from the headmen of villages in their jurisdiction not to allow any Sikh to live there. If there were some Sikhs, they were to be arrested and sent to the neighbouring police station. In case they could not capture them, a report was to be lodged with Government officials about their presence. Scouts roamed about everywhere to see that the lambardars or village headmen obeyed the government orders. Local intelligencers were appointed to report in secret at the nearby police or military posts. Connivance on their part resulted in imprisonment and confiscation of property.

They declared their own lists of prizes : Rs. 10/- for supplying information about the presence of a Sikh, Rs. 20/- for actually showing a Sikh, Rs. 40/- for helping in his capture, and Rs. 80/- for bringing every Sikh head".⁴⁹

Forster writes: "such was the keen spirit that animated the persecution, such was the success of the exertions, that the name of a Sicque no longer existed in the Mughal dominion. Those who still adhered to the tenets of Nanock, either fled into the mountains at the head of the Punjab, or cut off their hair, and exteriorly renounced the profession of their religion."⁵⁰

"The faithful followers of the guru experienced the worst possible

time in their history. Hunted like hare and pursued like wild beasts they wandered from place to place seeking shelter to save themselves from the fury of the government, from the revenge of the hostile Muslim population, and from the greed of the toady Hindus.’⁵¹

‘If anybody enquired of a Hindu woman how many sons she had, she would reply that she had three sons, but one of them had become a Sikh. Thereby she meant that the converted one should be considered among the dead.’⁵²

‘Majha, the homeland of the Sikhs, was completely ruined.’⁵³

“A wonderful and terrible trial indeed, from which the weak came out strong, from which the strong came out sublime. There were many great deeds done in the small struggles of life. There was a determined though unseen bravery, which defended itself foot to foot in the darkness, noble and mysterious triumphs which no eye could see.”⁵⁴

It has been estimated that the number of these guerillas was at one time reduced to about two thousand men.⁵⁵ From this small force, they grew from strength to strength and not only challenged the Mughal empire, but became the masters of the country right upto the bank of Jamuna. To quote Gupta again: “Thus had the Sikhs emerged triumphant from their deadly struggle of the past thirty years; and the long-drawn agony of their subjection came to an end, and the dream of their independence was realized. They had admirably succeeded in holding their own and in steadily pursuing their course, notwithstanding the hosts of terrors and disasters that gathered themselves together, not only to check their ardour and to intercept their progress, but also to bring them to the verge of annihilation. Surging floods of opposition rose and increased; the impetuous rains of consternation descended and fell; the rending storms of desperation blew and reged; and all these opposing elements struck and beat upon them; but they could not shake the sturdy Sikhs standing on the steel-like rock of faith and freedom. The internal vigour consisting of their dogged faith in themselves and in the prophecy of Guru Gobind Singh that they would one day become a nation, their determined courage and unconquerable spirit of resistance, not only sustained them against the bloody persecution of a great Government determined to suppress them, but

also raised them up again with greater strength after every attempt to annihilate them... ”⁵⁶

Gupta is so much impressed by the achievements of the movement that he ask the question, “Readers! have we not witnessed a miracle?⁵⁷. The struggle waged by the Khalsa was so glorious that any people in any culture would be proud of it.

What was the secret of this miracle? Was it wrought about by the ‘marauding instinct’ which is associated with the Jats? The Jats no doubt played a significant role, but which Jats? There was Bhai Taru Singh who preferred his scalp to be removed rather than let his hair be cut; and there were Jats who cut their hair with their own hands in order to desert the Khalsa. One has to separate the grain from the chaff. Non-Jats or Jats, it was those elements who had fully imbibed the Sikh ideology who worked this miracle. It is they who were the steel-frame of the movement. it was not an ordinary warfare. It tested to the farther human limit a person’s faith in his cause, his endurance. ‘The story of the Sikh deeds opens up the great difference between head and heart, between knowledge and action, between saying and doing between words and works, and between a dead and a living faith.’⁵⁸ As Bhangu has put it :

“The Singhs had no resources;
 Were without arms and clothes.
 Were naked, hungry and thirsty;
 Had no ammunition with them.
 Had no access to shops or markets;
 Those who fell sick dead for lack of medicine.
 They were sustained by the hope of Guru’s benediction;
 This was the only treasure they had.”⁵⁹

Only those could come out successful through this fiery ordeal who had in full measure faith in God, the Guru and the ultimate triumph of the righteousness of the cause. During this long period of trail, only the best could face the challenge. The question of any weak person joining the movement for mundane considerations did not arise. Those who did, left the faith on the first sign of a crisis, as all they had

to do was to cut off their hair and join the common populace around them.

The Khalsa guerillas were dispersed into very small bands, sometimes of twos and fours, and in widely separated areas like those of the Siwalik hills, Lakhi jungle and the desert wastes bordering Rajputana. They had no common centre and no common leader. Contacts among the guerilla bands were rare. The only sentiment that held them together and made them converge for collective action was attachment to a common cause and the deepest commitment to the faith. Arjan Dass Malik writes that sustained guerilla warfare is not possible without an ideological inspiration. "As early as the very origin of the term guerilla, Napoleon had observed that "in Spain moral considerations made up three quarters of the game and the relative balance of military power accounted only for the remaining quarter.' T.E. Lawrence stresses the same point when he says: 'We had won a province, when we had taught the civilians in it to die for our idea of freedom.' Guerilla warfare thus has been ideological from the very outset."⁶⁰ Again, 'a guerilla is not an ill-trained, badly armed civilian-soldier, as he appears to be; he is, rather, an intensely motivated and highly dedicated soldier who has a keen sense of issues at stake and understands the nature of war he is fighting. His strength lies inside, in the moral considerations which 'make three-fourths of him.'⁶¹ And, 'his objective lies not in the field of battle but elsewhere, among the people... Guerilla warfare is essentially a form of people's war in which a revolutionary vanguard, relying upon the support of the people, initiates limited armed action to gradually weaken the enemy and to bring about a situation of mass involvement culminating in the final defeat of the enemy and the attainment of peoples' political objective.'⁶²

CHAPTER XV

The Spirit

1. The Revolutionary Zeal

The spirit that inspires and sustains a movement is an important factor in determining its character and strength. It is especially so in the case of such idealistic movements as, for long periods, raise and sustain their participants to a high and noble level of functioning, despite the gravitational pulls of narrow selfish interests and common human failings. There is a spark in human nature which yearns eternally for freedom and equality. The strength of the Sikh movement, so long as its revolutionary phase lasted, lay in kindling that spark. The Sikh history shows in bold relief that, when fired with an ideal, human beings have an amazing capacity to bear untold sufferings and to make supreme sacrifices.

We have referred to the martyrdom of Guru Arjan and Guru Teg Bahadur. Both the gurus were inspired by their faith in the Immortal Spirit. His Command and His Mission. "When all from whom man looked for assistance have fled, and all succour is at an end. If he then remembers God, no hot wind shall strike him."¹ "Nanak everything is in Thy Power, Thou art my refuge."²

Beside the heroes who sacrificed their lives in the battles of Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh, the first Sikh martyrs who silently and courageously suffered death by extreme torture, were Bhai Mati Das and Bhai Dyala. Bhai Mati Das was sawn alive and Bhai Dyala was roasted alive in a cauldron of boiling oil. This was done in the presence of Guru Teg Bahadur in order to frighten him into submission. Had they chosen, these martyrs could have saved themselves by embracing Islam. But they did not. This was because

of the unflinching faith in the Guru, his mission and the religion, of which, we reiterate, human freedom and equality are essential ingredients.

When the Five Beloved Ones (Panj Pyaras) responded to the call of Guru Gobind Singh and offered their lives to him, it was clearly an act of implicit faith in him. In fact, the Guru gave the call in order to test the faith of his men in the leader. The ideological basis of the same as it was in the case of Bhai Mati Das and Bhai Dyala.

With the creation of the Khalsa and the progress of its armed struggle, the ideological objectives and implications of the revolutionary movement became clearly defined. It became plain that the Sikh movement aimed at not only fighting religious and political dictation, but also at capturing political power for itself. This aspect of the movement grew to be its dominant feature. Consequently, it became a significant element in the motivation of its participants. Secondly, Guru Gobind Singh had identified himself with the Khalsa, body and soul. Faith in the Guru became indistinguishable from faith in the aims and objectives of the Khalsa. The Gurus had all along been striving to transform faith in the person of Guru into faith in the ideals the Gurus stood for. As the Khalsa stood for revolutionary ideals, faith in the Guru mutated into faith in the revolutionary ideals of the Khalsa. The plebian character of the Sikh movement had a direct mass appeal. Therefore, it attracted into its fold a large number of persons from the lower castes. In the post-Guru period, the source of inspiration was the belief that the Khalsa, in which 'the lowest were equal with the highest',³ was bound to capture political power, as the Guru himself had bestowed sovereignty on them. In the above context, we give examples that show the spirit of self-sacrifice and the tenacity of purpose which the revolutionary aspirations had generated in the common people.

The two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh, aged seven and nine, were captured and brought to Sirhind. The governor asked them: "Boys! What would you do if we were to give you your liberty!" The boys answered: "We would collect our Sikhs, supply them implements of war, fight with you and put you to

death.” The governor then asked, “If you were defeated in the fight, what would you do then?” The boys replied : “We would collect our armies again and either kill you or be killed.”

After the battle of Anandpur, when Guru Gobind Singh reached Chamkaur, he had a small number of his followers left with him. As the Mughal troops, overwhelming in numbers, were on their heels, the Guru and his men hastily occupied a commander of the imperial troops sent a message to the guru asking him to realize his disparate position and to surrender. The Guru’s son, Ajit Singh, could not tolerate his challenge to the Guru’s resolve. He drew his scimitar and exclaimed to the messenger: “Utter another word and I will smite your head from your body and cut you to pieces, for daring so to address our chief.”⁴

Among the Sikhs at the Chamkaur seige was one Bhai was one Bhai Jiwan Singh Rangreta. He “Was a great marksman; He held one tower single handed.”⁵ Cunningham writes: “At Chamkaur, in one of the towers of the small brick fort, is still shown the tomb of a distinguished warrior, a Sikh of the sweeper caste, named Jivan Singh, who fell during the seige. The bastion itself is known as that of the martyr.”^{5a} This shows how the revolutionary spirit had seized men even from among the lowest castes, and how the movement honoured its martyrs without considerations of caste.

Some Sikhs from the Majha tract had deserted the Guru when he was beseiged at Anandpur. When they reached their homes, they were not well received and were reproached for betraying the movement. A lady named Mai Bhago took a leading part in rallying these deserters back to the cause and in retrieving the damage that had been done to their reputation. Under the leadership of Mai Bhago, they joined the Guru again when he was at Khidrana. By that time the Mughal troops had closed upon the Guru. The Brars, a Jat tribe, who had joined the Guru with mercenary motives, took to their heels on seeing the enemy. These men from Majha, died fighting, one by one, but they successfully prevented the Mughal troops from reaching the Guru. When the battle was over, the

Guru went to the battlefield to look after the injured. He saw one Bhai Mahan Singh who was at his last movements. The Guru asked Mahan Singh to express his last wish. Mahan Singh replied that he wished nothing of this world nor of the next. All that he wanted was that he and his company should be forgiven for having forsaken him and the Sikh cause at Anandpur.⁶ This episode illustrates the contrast between the revolutionaries and the non-revolutionaries. The Brars had offered to support the guru when he had no men of his own with him, but they later demanded payment for their services. But, when the very first opportunity to fight arose, they slipped away. On the other hand, the Sikhs from Majha were not mercenaries. Bhai Mahan Singh spurned even the so-called salvation or Mukti. He and his companions rejoined the Guru because they wanted to erase the stigma of having earlier forsaken the Guru and the revolutionary mission. It is not a contrast between the valour of Brar Jats and that of Majha Jats. It is a contrast between those who were fired by a revolutionary zeal and those who were not. This episode also shows that the revolutionary ideals had penetrated even to the level of womenfolk. Mai Bhago not only led the men to the Guru, but she herself also participated in the battle at Khidrana.

Another episode is even more illustrative of the difference between the spirit of revolutionaries and that of others. Dalla, the leader of the Brars, was very loud in his profession of loyalty to the Guru. He even boasted that, had he and his men been present at Anandpur, the Guru would not have suffered a reverse. Somebody at that time presented a musket to Guru Gobind Singh. He asked Dalla to bring someone out of his followers, who would agree to become a human target, because he wanted to test the new musket. Who would dare to offer himself? The news, however, infiltrated to two of the guru's own men. Both came running to the Guru. There was a great argument between them as to who had the first right to become the target. Both the men, who disputed the right to become a target, were Rangretas.⁷ If loyalty of different castes were to be judged by such events of the revolutionary phase of the Sikh movement, one would be tempted to come to the conclusion that the Rangretas were superior to the Brar

Jats in loyalty to the guru and in courage. But, this would be a wrong inference. The behaviour of an individual did not flow from his caste origin, it arose from the quality and the depth of the revolutionary spirit imbibed by him. The hard core of the Sikh movement consisted of men who had been drawn to it by its revolutionary appeal. No doubt, the movement had a greater appeal to the lower castes, including the Jats, than to the higher castes, because it expounded the cause of the downgraded people. But men were not drawn to it because of caste considerations. In fact, one of the vows on being baptized into the Khalsa brotherhood was to shed off all caste consciousness.

After the Guru period, one of the most, if not the most, revered Sikh in the Panth was Bhai Mani Singh. He was the custodian of the Hari Mandir at Amritsar. When the Khalsa Dal was reorganized, it was done under his leadership and patronage. While the Sikhs were being persecuted, he was arrested by the Mughals and ordered to be cut to pieces, joint by joint. This torture to death he accepted stoically.^{7a} This is a classic example of the spirit that inspired the Sikhs. Bhai Mani Singh's martyrdom is recounted to this day at the time of every Sikh Ardas, (supplication to God). Bhai Mani Singh belonged to a family of Labanas, who 'appear to be by origin closely allied with, if not actually belonging to, the vagrant and possibly aboriginal tribes.'⁸ This illustrates that there was no prejudice or inhibition whatsoever that would prevent people drawn from the so-called low castes from occupying the most preeminent position in the Panth.

At one of those periods, when it was thought that the Singhs had been completely annihilated, some people saw one Bhai Bota Singh loitering about. They were surprised how this Singh had survived. A spectator remarked, 'He must be a coward dog who had been hiding himself.'⁹ This was too much for Bota Singh to swallow; he was stung to the quick. He thought that he must demonstrate that the Khalsa, which claimed sovereignty, was alive. In order to invite the attention of authorities, he and Bhai Jivan Singh Rangreta started levying toll tax on the then G.T. Road to Lahore near Tarn Taran.¹⁰ The authorities attacked them and they died fighting just to show that the Sikh revolution was a living reality. Bhai Sukh Singh was a carpenter. In

order to wean him away from the Khalsa, he was drugged and made unconscious by his relatives. His hair was cut. When he recovered consciousness, he could not tolerate the disgrace and leapt into a well.^{10a} He was saved and taunted that if he wanted to die he should die a man's death (a hero's death) rather than of a coward. He joined the Khalsa and later rose to be the commander of the Sikh forces during the days of the Chota Ghalughara. This was the spirit which animated the hard core of the Khalsa revolutionaries. It was this spirit which brought about the miracle. It also shows that the comradeship-in-arms had extended itself to the lowest social strata, even to the Rangretas.

There are endless accounts testifying to the revolutionary spirit that animated the Sikh movement. However, we limit ourselves to a few reports by non-Sikh sources.

William Irvine writes about Banda and the band of his followers when brought as prisoners to Delhi: "The streets were so crowded with spectators that to pass was difficult. Such a crowd had been rarely seen. The Muhammadans could hardly contain themselves for joy. But the Sikhs, in spite of the condition to which they had been reduced, maintained their dignity, and no sign of dejection or humility could be detected on their countenances. Many of them, as they passed along on their camels, seemed happy and cheerful. If any spectator called out to them that their evil deeds and oppressions had brought them where they then were, they retorted, without a moment's hesitation, in the most reckless manner. They were content, they said, That Fate had willing their capture and destruction. If any man in the crowd threatened that he would kill them then and there, they shouted, "Kill us, kill us, why should we fear death? It was only through hunger and thirst that we fell into your hands. If that had not been the case, you know already what deeds of bravery we are capable of."¹¹ All observers, Indian and European, unite in remarking on the wonderful patience and resolution with which these men underwent their fate. Their attachment and devotion to their leader were wonderful to behold. They had no fear of death, they called the executioner Mukht, or the Deliverer. They cried out to him joyfully "O Mukht ! kill me first."¹²

The English ambassadors in Delhi at that time reported to their head that about 780 prisoners had been brought to the place along with Banda and that one hundred of them were beheaded each day. "It is not a little remarkable with what patience they under-go their fate, and to the last it has not been found that one apostatized from his new formed religion."¹³

Khafi Khan writes, "Many stories are told about the wretched dogs of this sect, which the understanding rejects; but the author will relate what he saw with his own eyes. When the executions were going on, the mother of one of the prisoners, a young man just arrived at manhood, having obtained some influential support, pleaded the cause of her son with great feeling and earnestness before the emperor and Saiyad Abdullah Khan. She represented that her son had suffered imprisonment and hardship at the hands of the sect. His property was plundered and he was made prisoner. While in captivity, he was, without any fault of his own, introduced into the sect, and now stood innocent among those sentenced to death. Farrukh Siyar commiserated this artful women, and mercifully sent an officer with orders to release the youth. That cunning woman arrived with his bloody sword upheld over the young man's head. She showed this order for his release. The youth then broke out into complaints, saying: "My mother tells a falsehood; I with heart and soul join my fellow-believers in devotion to the Guru; send me quickly after my companions."¹⁴

Muhammed Latif comes to the conclusion: "The pages of history shine with the heroic deeds of this martial race, and the examples of self-devotion, patriotism and forbearance under the severest trails, displayed by the leaders of their community, are excelled by none in the annals of the nations."^{14a}

2. Charhdi Kala

The Ardas (prayer) of the Sikhs asks for the boon of 'Naam' (God-centredness), 'Charhdi Kala' (Unflinching optimism), and 'Sarbat da Bhala' (the welfare of all). By declaring that 'the Khalsa belonged to God, and so did its victory', Guru Gobind Singh hitched the wagon of the Sikh movement to God, a never-ending source

of inspiration, energy and optimism. The greatest casualties the Sikhs ever suffered were at the hand of Abdali in the battle known as “Wada Ghallughara” (the great holocaust). When the battle was over, a Nihang went about saying loudly: ‘The Pure (tat) Khalsa is intact, only dross has been shed off.’¹⁵ Forster states that the Sikhs ‘hold a lamentation for the death of any person criminal’, and ‘make merry on the demise of any of their brethren’.^{15a}

Hari Ram Gupta writes: ‘These Sikhs had to experience very hard times. Persecuted, exiled, and tracked down like wild beasts, they kept themselves concealed during the day and came out at night in search of food. They lived on wild plants, fruit, and flesh. Day by day their sufferings increased, but they remained firm in their resolution. During their days of oppression, the Sikhs chose to beguile themselves in their own simple manner. They coined luxurious names for humble things of daily use, as also contemptuous expressions for their enemies.’¹⁶

‘The arrival of one Sikh was announced as the advent of a host of one lakh and a quarter, five Sikhs declared themselves an army of five lakhs; death was termed an expedition of the Sikh to the next world; a blind man was called a wide awake hero; a half-blind man was addressed as an argues-eyes lion; a deaf man was a person living in the garret; a hungry man was called mad with prosperity; a stone mortar was named a golden vessel; *saag* (a cooked preparation of green leaves) was green pulao; cooked meat was *mahaprashad*; *piluus* (the fruit of a wild tree) were dry grapes, grams were almonds; onions were silver pieces; to be fined by the Panth for some fault was called getting one’s salary; to speak was to roar and a *damri* (a copper coin worth one quarter of a pice) was called a rupee. On the other hand, a rupee was nothing but an empty crust.’¹⁷

‘This is a striking feature of the Sikh life at this time, when they were suffering from an acute form of persecution. It shows that pain and suffering had lost all meaning to them, and they could still enjoy bubbling humour and brightness and vigour of life. Poverty and hardship served a most useful purpose in uniting them with one another in the closest ties. All differences which arise between man and man in times of peace were effaced beneath the terrible levelling of the oppression;

all men had become brothers, all women sisters. An iron will, an unbent spirit and unbounded enthusiasm for their faith were their rewards of this mode of living.’¹⁸

It was Zakaria Khan, the governor of Lahore, who had launched a campaign for the extermination of the Khalsa. On learning that the Singhs still cherished hopes of seizing the government, he exclaimed, “O God; to eat grass and to claim kingship!”¹⁹

3. The Triumph of the Revolutionary Spirit

Revolutions are generally at a disadvantage, in terms of material resources, as compared to the established order these want to overthrow. The Sikh Revolution could not even dream of matching the military might of the Mughal Empire. The contest between the Mughal state and the Sikh Revolution was qualitatively different from contests between feudal or Imperial contending powers depending upon the respective might of their military machines. The Sikh movement depended for its success entirely upon the power it derived from the masses. In revolutions, it is the people, not weapons, that are decisive in the final analysis. The ultimate victory of the Sikh Revolution over the Mughal state was, above all, a triumph of the Sikh revolutionary spirit and morale over that of the Mughals. It is a remarkable feat of the Sikh movement, attested by independent evidence, that none of the revolutionaries, including women and children, adjured their faith in the face of the barbaric tortures current in that age.²⁰ ‘When a Sikh was brought before him (Shah Nawaz Khan, the governor of Lahore) his belly was cut in his presence and sometimes his brain was taken out by driving a nail (into his head)’²¹ The Sikh revolutionaries could save their lives by embracing Islam, but they did not. This exceptional display of the revolutionary spirit was mainly due to three factors. The Sikh Gurus had charged their followers with a rare synthesis of the revolutionary zeal with the religious faith. Secondly, it was for the first time in Indian history that the masses were inspired to capture political power for their own interests and in their own hands. And, the people were convinced and aroused because the Sikh Gurus and other leaders of the movement were always in the forefront in making supreme sacrifices for the revolutionary cause.

CHAPTER XVI

Achievements

The achievements of a movement cannot be fully appreciated unless one takes into account the circumstances and the limitations under which it worked. It is in this perspective that the achievements of the Sikh movement should be judged. Human efforts for growing a beautiful orchard in the Sahara desert, even if partially successful, would indeed be magnificent.

The Sikh Movement had set before itself three main social goals: to create an egalitarian society (The Sikh Panth) outside the caste order, to fight religious and political domination, and to capture political power for a plebian mission. All these three goals were closely linked and inter-dependent.

1. Egalitarian Society

The caste is a many-headed hydra. The sanction of the Brahminical scriptures, ritualism and tradition, the sacerdotal position of the Brahmins, and the theory of pollution, of which restrictions connected with occupations, commensalism, etc., were offshoots, were the main pillars which supported the caste structure. It has been seen that the Sikh movement attacked all these pillars and achieved a very remarkable success.

(a) Scriptural Sanction

By repudiating the authority of the Brahmanical scriptures, and other features of the Brahmanism, the Sikh Panth cut itself away from this perennial source of caste ideology. This was a very major step that was taken. Its significance can be ignored only by those who underestimate the part played by the caste ideology in rearing and maintaining the caste system.

(b) *Brahmins*

The second great pillar of the caste system was the Brahmin. The caste and the position of the Brahmins in this system 'is the fundamental institution of Hinduism.'¹ It is the Brahmins who were the ideologues of the caste system, and the Dharma was the exclusive product of the Brahmins. 'Dharma, that is, ritualistic duty, is the central criterion of Hinduism;'² and the Brahmins were the grand-masters of the ceremonies. Even otherwise, the Brahmins were the kingpin of the caste system. The 'whole- system turns on the prestige of the Brahmin,'³ The 'central position of the Brahmins in Hinduism rests primarily upon the fact that social rank is determined with reference to Brahmins.'⁴ The 'Brahmin reception or rejection of water' and food is the measure of the status of any given caste in a given place,'⁵

It has been noted that the Brahmins and Khatri, used to be a privileged caste status, remained aloof when the Khalsa, with complete equality of castes, was created. In the census of 1881, of the total number of Brahmins only about 7,000 were Sikhs. The denial of the superiority claimed by the higher castes, which distinguished the teaching of Guru Gobind Singh, was not acceptable to the Brahmins,⁶ For this reason the number of Sikh Brahmins was very low, even though the Brahmins were the third most numerous caste in the Punjab, outnumbering all but Jats and Rajputs.⁷ The proportion of Brahmins in the population 'steadily changes with the prevailing religion,it gradually decreases from east to west, being markedly smaller in the central and Sikh districts,'⁸ These facts are very significant. "The Brahmins have no territorial organisations, They accompany their clients in their migrations"⁹ Therefore, the insignificant number of Brahmins in the Sikh population corroborates the well known fact that the Sikhs have no priestly class, much less¹⁰ hereditary Levite caste, having vested interests in maintaining a hierarchical structure in the Sikh society.

By eliminating the influence of Brahmins in the Panth, the Sikh society eliminated the kingpin of the caste system from within its ranks. Max Weber has made a clear distinction between Hindu castes and non-Hindu castes, "There are also castes among the Mohammadans

of India, taken over from the Hindus. And castes are also found among the Buddhists. Even the Indian Christians have not quite been able to withhold themselves from practical recognition of the castes. These non-Hindu castes have lacked the tremendous emphasis that the Hindu doctrine of salvation placed upon the caste, as we shall see later, and they have lacked a further characteristic, namely, the determination of the social rank of the castes by the social distance from other Hindu castes, and therewith, ultimately, from the Brahmin. This is decisive for the connection between Hindu castes and the Brahmin; however intensely a Hindu caste may reject him as a priest, as a doctrinal and ritual authority, and in every other respect, the objective situation remains inescapable; in the last analysis, a rank position is determined by the nature of its positive or negative relation to the Brahmin.¹⁰

From the time of Guru Nanak upto the Misal times, a period of nearly three centuries, no caste was observed in the Sikh society. True, some vestiges of caste appeared later in the post-Khalsa period. As with the Mohammadans, it was a takeover from the Hindus. In the case of the Sikhs, this 'take-over' is quite understandable, because their social roots were close to those of the Hindus. But, these caste considerations among the Sikhs of the post-Khalsa period, lacked 'the tremendous emphasis that the Hindu doctrine of salvation placed upon caste.' Caste among the Sikhs also lacked the determination of the social rank of caste by its distance from the Brahmins. Among the Sikhs, this delinking of the castes from their scriptural sanction and the Brahmins made a major contribution in eroding the validity and the sanctity of the caste system. Instead, the observance of caste distinctions is considered a clear social and moral fault frowned upon by the Sikh religion.

(c) Commensalism

We referred to Hutton's opinion that the taboo on food and drink 'is probably the keystone of the whole system,' There was a magical distance between different castes. In some cases the mere look of a low caste person at the meal defiled it. 'Complete fraternization of castes has been and is impossible because it is one of the constitutive principles of the castes that there should be at least ritually inviolable

barriers against complete commensalism among different castes.¹¹

As against these rigid restrictions, the members of the Khalsa Dal, drawn from all castes, including the Rangretas, always dined, without any inhibitions, from a common kitchen.¹² The institution of Langer, i.e. dining together freely and at a common place, has continued throughout in the Sikh Society. In undoing the restrictions on inter-caste commensalism, the Sikh movement removed 'one of the constitutive principles of the caste.' The success of the Sikh movement in fostering the spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization in the Sikh Panth, and developing unrestricted commensalism among its members, as has been seen, was remarkable indeed. And, to the extent it succeeded, it also cut at the roots of those ritual and magical barriers and religiously sanctioned notions of human inequality which formed the basis of caste endogamy and other caste discriminations.

(d) Occupations

Nesfield has shown how determinative were certain notions and taboos, relating to occupations and crafts, in assigning the social position in the caste hierarchy. Rarely, 'does a Brahman or a Rajput, no matter how deeply degraded, ever take up one of the ancient crafts.'^{12a} 'We have the Sahnsars of Hushyarpur who were Rajputs within the last two or three generations, but have ceased to be so because they grow vegetables like the Arain.'¹³ The Rajputs of the Punjab look upon 'all manual labour as derogatory, and upon the actual operation of ploughing as degrading; and it is only the poorest class of Rajputs who will himself follow the plough'.¹⁴ Among the Rajputs of the Punjab hills, 'The prejudice against the plough is perhaps the most inveterate of all; that step can never be recalled. The offender at once loses the privileged salutation; he is reduced to the second grade of Rajputs.'^{14a} The Brahmins, like the Rajputs, 'look upon the actual operation of ploughing as degrading.'¹⁵

In the Sikh society, the emphasis is laid on doing honest labour (Dasan Nawan dee Kirat). The Sikh Jat is proud of his being a cultivating peasant.¹⁶ In no way does he regard himself as inferior to the Rajput.¹⁷ In the caste society, Tarkhan (carpenter) was considered 'a true village menial',¹⁸ But one of the twelve Sikh Missals was led by

Ramgarhias. Even today they form a more well-to-do section of the Sikh society than the Jats. Persons, like Jassa Singh, Sukha Singh and others belonging to the low castes have creditably led the entire community.

(e) *Reversal of Caste Priorities*

The Chuhras are the 'out-caste, par excellence of the Punjab, whose name is popularly supposed to be corruption of Sudra.'¹⁸ As such, they were about the most despised caste in the Punjab; mere bodily contact with whom defiled a person of a higher caste. On conversion to Sikhism, persons from this caste were given the honorific title of Rangreta in order to raise them in public estimation, much in the same way as depressed classes are now-a-days called Harijans. A rhyme, 'Rangreta, Guru ka beta', meaning 'Rangreta is the son of the Guru', current in the Punjab,²⁰ is an indication of the status to which the Sikh movement sought to raise them. We have seen how Rangretas (whose touch, had they remained in the caste society, defiled not only the person but also the food he carried) were coequal members of the Khalsa Dal, where they dined and fraternized, without discrimination, with other Dal members drawn from Brahmins, Khatri, Jats and others. When the Taruna Dal (the Youth wing of the Khalsa Dal) was reorganized into five divisions, one of these was under the leadership of Bir Singh, Rangreta. It was bestowed a standard flag (Jhanda) from the Akal Takht in the same manner as was done in the case of the other four divisions.²¹ It was thus given an equal status with them. When Ala Singh defeated the army of Malerkotla with the help of the Khalsa Dal and offered horses to honour the Dal, the first to receive the honour, as selected by the Dal, was Bir Singh, Rangreta.²² And, when the revolutionary zeal subsided, the Sikhs from castes, who had previously no hesitation in fraternizing with the Rangretas in the Khalsa Dal, again started discriminating against them in the post-Khalsa period. This contrast, in a way, highlights the achievement of the movement during the Khalsa phase. True, this peak period lasted for about only three quarters of a century after the Gurus left the scene. But, idealism is rarely sustained for long periods, and we are not aware of any idealistic movement in the world which lasted in its

purity for such a long period after its originators left the scene.

We have taken the case of Rangretas because it is very much illustrative, they being the lowest caste from which Sikhs were recruited. But, it is the Jats, who form the majority in the present day Panth and who have benefitted most in the elevation of their social status by joining the Sikh ranks. It is mainly because they were able to retain, unlike the Rangretas, the gains that accrued to them. The present day social status of the Sikh Jats is taken so much for granted that it is seldom that their past, prior to their joining the Sikh movement, is recalled. 'In A.D. 836, an Arab governor summoned them to appear and pay jiziya, each to be accompanied by a dog, a mark of humiliation prescribed also under the previous Brahman regime.'²³ 'Albaruni (C. 1030), whose direct experience of India was confined to the Lahore area, took the Jats to be 'Cattle-owners, low Shudra people.'²⁴ The author of the *Debistan-i-Mazahib* (Ca. 1655) in his account of Sikhism describes the Jats as 'the lowest caste of the Vaishyas'.²⁵ In contrast to this position, 'under the Sikhs the Rajput was over-shadowed by the Jat, who resented his assumption of superiority and his refusal to join him on equal terms in the ranks of the Khalsa, deliberately persecuted him wherever and whenever he had the power, and preferred his title of Jat Sikh to that of the proudest Rajput.'²⁶ That this was all due to the Sikh movement becomes clear if the status of Sikh Jats of the Sikh tract is compared with that of other Jats who are his immediate neighbours. About the non-Sikh Jats in the eastern submontane tract, Ibbetson writes in his census report (1881) : 'In character and position there is nothing to distinguish the tribes I am about to notice, save that they have never enjoyed the political importance which distinguished the Sikh Jats under the Khalsa.. In the Sikh tract, the political position of the Jat was so high that he had no wish to be called Rajput; under the hills the status of the Rajput is so superior that the Jat has no hope of being called Rajput.'²⁷ Similarly, although the Jats of the south-eastern districts 'of the Punjab differ 'in little save religion from the great Sikh Jat tribes of the Malwa',²⁸ they remained subservient to the Rajputs upto a recent period of the British Raj. There, 'In the old days of Rajput ascendancy, the Rajputs would not allow Jats to cover their heads with a turban', and 'even to this day

Rajputs will not allow inferior castes to wear red clothes or ample lion cloths in their villages.²⁹ In the predominantly Muhammadan Western Punjab, the Jat is 'naturally looked upon as of inferior race, and the position he occupies is very different from that which he holds in the centre and east of the Punjab.'³⁰

We are not giving these quotations in order to approve of the air of superiority assumed by the Sikh Jats; because the Sikh movement aimed at leveling up social status of all kinds and not at substituting the status-superiority of one caste or class for that of another. However, these instances do show how far the movement succeeded in breaking the order of social precedence established by the caste society and in permanently raising the social status of a social group which now forms the majority in the Sikh Panth.

The Sikh Jat, who humbled the Rajput, could naturally not be expected to own the superiority of any other caste. 'The Banya with his sacred thread, his strict Hinduism, and his twice-born standing looks down on the Jat as a Sudra. But the Jat looks down upon the Banya as a cowardly spiritless money-grabber, and the society in general agrees with the Jat.'³¹ Therefore, the social distance between the Sikh Jats and those from the so-called higher castes became minimal. In fact, it was a relationship of rival claims to superiority, or equality, based on a tussle between hierarchical Brahmanical notions retained by one section of the community and a new sense of equality born out of the Sikh movement acquired by the other. Nowhere else in the caste society, the common peasantry could attain to this position of equality and dignity.

We are not ignoring or justifying the caste distinctions that later crept in the Sikh Panth in the post-Khalsa period. There is a general tendency for societies to lapse into their old ruts even after having passed through a revolution. But, a revolution, once having taken place, does secure some gains. The lower menial castes are the only social strata that did not, in the long run, benefit materially from the Sikh revolution, although in the Khalsa period the Rangretas occupied an honourable position in the Khalsa Dal. Rose mentions that one of the Misals, that of Nishanias, was shared by the Khatri and the

Rangretas.³² This means that the Rangretas were co-sharers of political power right up to the period of the Missals. How they came to lose this position of vantage is a subject which has not been fully investigated. All that we can say is that there was, even at a late period in the British Raj, a feeling among the Chuhras and Chamars, when there could be no political pressure of the Sikhs drawn from higher castes on them, that they could improve their social standing by joining the Sikh ranks.

The Mazhbis (the Chuhras who become Sikhs) 'refuse to touch night soil.'³³ A very considerable number of Chamars have embraced the Sikh religion. These men are called Ramdasia after Guru Ravi Das. 'Many, perhaps most of the Ramdasia Chamars have abandoned leather-work for the loom; they do not eat carrion, and they occupy a much higher position than the Hindu Chamars, though they are not admitted to religious equality by the other Sikhs.'³⁴

I.P. Singh conducted a sociological study (1959, 1961) of two Sikh villages, Daleka in Amritsar district and Nalli in Ludhiana district. According to him, though Mazhbis (Sikh converts from Chuhras who are the out-castes per-excellence of the Punjab) live in a separate hem let and have a separate well, 'yet no miasma of touch pollution is attributed to them.' They sit among others in the temple. All Sikh jatis, excepting the Mazhbis, interdine. One of the granthis, the religious functionaries, of the village Daleka is a Mazhbi and is given the same respected position as is given to other granthis in the village. Though marriage is generally within the Jati, women may be brought in from lower jatis. They face little disadvantage on that account and their children suffer none. Complete abolition of jati division among Sikhs is still urged by itinerant preachers. On one such occasion, a Mazhbi rose to ask whether anyone in the audience would receive his daughters into their families in marriage. "Practically everybody in the audience, consisting of all castes, raised his hand". But when he asked who would give girls in marriage to his sons, no one volunteered.^{34a}

We have been stressing the point that the contribution made by a movement towards social progress should be judged in the environmental context it operates and not by absolute standards.

Where else in the caste society the Jats have been able to shed

off the miasma of touch pollution against the outcastes, and how many of them would publicly volunteer in a body to accept girls of Chuhras into their families in marriage? It would also be of interest to know in what ratio the number of whites, who have married Negro women in the U.S.A., bear to the total population of that country? This is not to say that the Sikh Jats are superior to the whites of the U.S.A. in overcoming prejudices of social exclusiveness which have sunk deep down in the human mind. There may be many factors which have to be taken into account before even an approximate comparison is attempted. All that we want to point out is the intractability of the problem and the need to assess the achievement of the Sikh Revolution in this light.

The achievements of movements, we reiterate, cannot be judged by absolute standards because few of them would measure upto them. No social movement, howsoever radical, can completely defy its environmental limitations for long. Viewed in this perspective, the success of the Sikh Panth in breaking the central core of the caste and its rigid social and economic restrictions has, indeed, been remarkable. What is more pertinent for a comparative judgment is whether any other movement in medieval or modern India has ever reached the heights the Sikh movement did in achieving its anti-caste goals.

2 Religious and Political Domination

The second objective of the Sikh movement was to fight religious and political domination. The success of the movement in this respect is so obvious that it needs no comment on our part.

'We now close the narrative of the Sikhs, who placed themselves at the head of the nation; who showed themselves as interpreters of the rights of the people; who maintained the struggle between good and evil, between the sovereign will of the people and the divine right of kings, and the opposition of liberty to despotism; who avenged the insults, the outrages and slavery of many generations past; who delivered their mother country from the yoke of the foreign oppressor; who displayed all that was great and noble; who left to the children of this province a heritage unsullied by the presence of any foreign soldier;

who won for the Punjab the envied title of "the land of soldiers"; who alone can boast of having erected a "bulwark of defence against foreign aggression", the tide of which had run its prosperous course for the preceding eight hundred years; and to whom all other people of Northern India in general, and of the Panjab in particular, owe a deep debt of gratitude."^{35*}

Gupta's conclusion is supported by indirect evidence. The Sikh tradition claims to have defeated Abdali in a pitched battle at Amritsar,^{35a} but it has not been verified. However, more to the point is the comment of the British governor in India at that time. "If they (Sikhs) continue to cut off his (Abdali's) supplies and plunder his baggage he will be ruined without fighting; and then he will either return to his country or meet with shame and disgrace. As long as he does not defeat the Sikhs or comes to terms with them, he cannot penetrate into India."^{30b} This is what exactly happened. Abdali himself appears to have not been unaware of this predicament; because he offered through intermediaries not to disturb the Sikhs in their possessions provided they did not harass him in his further advance into Hindustan.^{35c} In this way the Sikhs closed the door through which the flood of aggression from the North had been pouring into the country for centuries.

3. Plebian

Mission Irvine, who bases his account on that of contemporary Mohammadan historians, writes: 'In all the parganas occupied by the Sikhs, the reversal of previous customs was striking and complete. A low scavenger or leather dresser, the lowest of low in Indian estimation, had only to leave home and join the Guru (Banda), when in a short space of time he would return to his birth-place as its ruler, with his order of 'appointment in his hand. As soon as he set foot within the boundaries, the well-born and wealthy went out to greet him and escort

*Lest the reader gets the impression that Hari Ram Gupta is swayed by his enthusiasm, we quote from Jadunath Sarkar's foreword to his book:- 'One period of Panjab history-and that of the Delhi Empire, too - has thus been set up on a granite foundation. It ought to serve as a model to other workers on Indian history". Moreover, Hari Ram Gupta is not a Singh.

him home. Arrived there, the} stood before him with joined palms, awaiting his orders.'36 'All power was now usurped by the Sikhs, and one Bir Singh, a man of poor origin, belonging to pargana Haibetpur Patti in the Barri Doab, was appointed Subahdar or governor of Sirhind (Kanwar Khan, entry of 2nd Rabi 11, 1122. Bir Singh also appears as Baz, Taj and Baj Singh).'36a This happened within eighteen months of Guru Gobind Singh's death, i.e. very close to the Guru period when the Khalsa for the first time achieved political power temporarily. The next sixty years or so were spent in the revolutionary struggle against the Mughals and we have seen the spirit which animated the Khalsa during that period. But, when the success of the revolution became apparent, a large number of people, who had not fully imbibed the Sikh ideals, joined the Khalsa, for, the doors of the movement were open to one and all who accepted baptism. This became necessary because the movement depended for its successes entirely on the masses joining it in large numbers. Also, with the death of the older generations and the heavy casualties of the genuine revolutionaries in the grim struggle, the strength of elements inspired by the true Khalsa ideals, who set the tone of the movement, grew less and less. The movement was now separated from the Guru period by a gap of three generations. The result was that the purpose for which the Khalsa was created was gradually pushed to the background. Its place was taken by a new group consciousness, which may, for the sake of convenience, be called Khalsa national consciousness. This sense of nationality was heightened by the political success the Khalsa achieved. When the Khalsa was now in a position to assume political power, the concept of 'Khalsa Raj' was given a new twist. It was decided that every member of the Khalsa was free to take control of any area that he could, with the proviso that nobody could or should eject anyone who had occupied the area first. The latter condition was probably meant to ensure that every member of the Khalsa had an equal right to acquiring political power. It was forgotten that the Khalsa was created to fight domination and not to become an instrument of domination itself.

All the same, the Sikh movement was a great achievement from the plebian point of view. It is true that the Sikh revolution remained

confined to the Khalsa, whose membership was open to all. The general mass of the people, who were not Khalsa, did not actively participate in it. May be that its benefits did not accrue to them in any appreciable degree. Within the Khalsa itself, the political power was in the post-revolutionary period, shared by the Jats and the artisans. The outcastes, somehow, came to be relegated to the back position. But, it was nevertheless, a plebian revolution in the sense that, for the first time in Indian history, a class of commoners rose to be the masters of the land.

Waris Shah, the author of 'Hir and Ranjha', describes the state of affairs in the Punjab of this period:

"Men of menial birth flourish and the peasants are in great prosperity.

The Jats have become masters of our country,
Everywhere there is a new government."³⁷

All the members of the Sikh Panth, irrespective of their caste or class status came to be called, as they are even now, Sardars (overlords). This is not to approve of this development, because it was a departure from the Sikh ideals of human equality. But, the point is how the Sikh revolution raised the social and political status, not of stray individuals, but of a large section of the commoners en bloc.

Success and failure are relative terms. It has taken millions of years for the animal to become man. To transform the animal in human nature into a being of higher consciousness is a very difficult process. On this account, the march of humanity towards its ideals has been imperceptibly slow. The strain of acquisitiveness and aggressiveness in man, and other weaknesses of the human nature, have again and again side-tracked all progressive movements from their original aims and course. There is not one exception. To raise commoners from the level assigned to them by the caste ideology and the caste society and make them become the masters of the land was an exceptional historical development.

CHAPTER XVII

The Rajputs, the Marathas and the Khalsa

A broad comparison and contrast of the Khalsa movement with the other two main patterns of resistance offered to Mughal domination by the Rajputs and the Marathas would be very instructive. It would show how a revolutionary movement is qualitatively from the one which is not.

1. The Rajputs.

When the Muslim armies invaded and conquered India, it was the Rajputs who ruled the country from Punjab to Ajudhiya. It was they, therefore, who bore the brunt of the invaders' attack. Farishta tells us that, at one time, the Rajas of Ujjain, Gwalior, Kalunjar, Kanauj, Delhi and Ajmer entered into a confederacy, because they 'considered the expulsion of the Mohammadans from India as a sacred duty'.¹ The Hindus families, on this occasion, 'sold their jewels and melted down their golden ornaments (which they sent from distant parts) to furnish resources for the war.'² This statement would give it the appearance of a Hindu national upsurge, which it was not. Firstly, it was confined to the Rajputs. Secondly, the history of the Rajputs and the constitution of their polity both show that they were more concerned about their feudal or dynastic interests than with the Hindu religious or national sentiment as such.

Most of the leading ruling Rajput families gave their daughters in marriage to the Mughal princes at a time when an ordinary Hindu thought that his food was polluted if touched by a Muslim. To give in marriage women to the males of another society, which was despised, was to cross

or violate the strongest hurdle of social exclusiveness not only in the caste society but in class societies as well. The Rajputs became the pillars of the Mughal administration and military establishment. They were constantly employed in reducing into submission the enemies of the Mughal empire. Of the 416 Munsabdars, or military commanders of Akbar's empire, 47 were Rajputs. The aggregate of their quotas amounted to 53,000 horses, exactly one-tenth of the empire's total strength.³ The Rajput rulers of Marwar, Ambar, Bikaner and Bundi sided with Akbar against Rana Pratap.⁴ It was Man Singh who led the Mughal army against him in the crucial battle of Haldighat. Of the approximate ten thousand Mughal forces under Man Singh, some four thousands were his own clansmen and one thousands other Hindu auxiliaries.⁵ Again, it was Raja Jai Singh who was in charge of Aurangzeb's campaign against Shivaji.

The constitution of Rajputs polity also points in the same direction. It was a peculiar military-cum-partiarchal system which in its operation 'embraced every object of society.'⁶ 'The greater portion of the vassal chiefs, from the highest of the sixteen peers to the holders of a Chursa of land, claim affinity in blood to the sovereign.'⁷ From the chief who headed five hundred of his own vassals to the single horseman, all were supported by lands held by grants.'⁸ An important condition of the tenure was that 'at home and abroad, service shall be performed when demanded.'⁹ It was an exclusively Rajput system based on the domination and exploitation of non-Rajputs. 'Titles are granted, and even chiefs of office, to ministers and civil servants not Rajputs; they are, however, but official, and civil servants not Rajputs; they are, however, but official, and never confer hereditary right.'¹⁰ Although jit (jat) are included in the original 36 royal races of Rajasthan, none of them are bhumias, or occupy land free from revenue in Ajmer and Marwar.¹¹ A Rajput 'scorns to hold the plough',¹² and he who did was denegated in the Rajput aggrandizement was curtailed and some of them were forced to work with their own hands, they lived, one and all, on the exploitation of the non-Rajputs. Here is, perhaps, a rare caste where the economic interests of almost each

* Chursa, a hide of land, sufficient to furnish an equipped cavalier

individual of the ruling caste were directly involved, of course to varying degrees, in keeping their feudal system intact. That this became the overriding consideration with them is revealed by their readiness to collaborate with the Mughals against all Hindu norms. In fact, most of the Rajput chiefs, subsequent to the Mohammdan invasions, owe their establishments to the patronage of their conquerors.¹³ Their exploitative and dominating polity also left no scope for the Rajputs becoming the rallying point of other Hindus in resisting Mughal domination. The very military-cum-patriarchal-cum-feudal structure, which bound them together, created an unbridgeable gap between them and the non-Rajput people as a whole.

The prevailing sentiments, which motivated the Rajput activities, clearly reflect their political and social structure. For a Rajput, fidelity to the chief is the climax of all virtues.¹⁴ Allegiance is as hereditary as the land: "I am your child, my head and sword are yours, my service is at your command."¹⁵ But, his own immediate chief is the only authority he regards.¹⁶ 'In proof of this numerous instances could be given of whole clans devoting themselves to the chief against the sovereign.'¹⁷ This blind allegiance to authority led to two conspicuous consequences. Clannish interests were given preference over tribal interests and tribal interests over overall Rajput interests. This prevented the emergence of Rajput nationalism, leave alone prevented the emergence of Rajput nationalism, leave alone Hindu nationalism. Secondly, when and where the ruling Rajput chiefs decided to collaborate with the Mughal authority, their followers were dragged behind them with out ever questioning the propriety of that course.

Another prominent Rajput sentiment was their extreme love of their hierarchical status. It is doubtful whether this status consciousness of the Rajputs was due to the influence of the caste system; because the 'Rajputs of Rajputana are not so rigidly attached to caste as their brethren in other parts, and are not very respectful to Brahmans.'¹⁸ Any how, the Rajput love for hierarchical gradation had become almost a megalomania. Aberigh-Mackay, writing about the Rajput chiefs of Central India, says. 'He seldom cares for anything but the merest shadow of his dignity, the ceremony with which he is treated. Of this he is insanely jealous.'¹⁹ 'The poorest Rajput of this day retains all the

pride of ancestry, often his sole inheritance.’²⁰ ‘When Nadir Shah entered India, a compact was made between the three great tribes of the Sisodiyas, Rathors and Kachwahas, which would have had an important result politically.’ But this compact broke down simply on a question of social precedence.²¹

2. The Rajputs and the Khalsa

All those who are familiar with Rajput history have paid rich tributes to the valour of the Rajputs, their spirit of self-sacrifice, their fidelity, their sense of honour and many other virtues. Payne goes so far as to say that the history of the world hardly affords a parallel to the Rajput ‘spirit of constancy and enduring courage.’²² Many a nation have gone under because of internal decay of character, but the Rajputs lost their preeminence mainly because they lacked a unity of purpose. Tod writes: ‘The closest attention to their history proves beyond contradiction that they were never capable of unity even for their own preservation.’²³ This was because they were never inspired by any motive higher than that of the preservation of their feudal interests. As the patriarchal-cum-feudal constitution of their society confined their loyalties as well as their economic interests to small units, they lacked even the perspective of forming a Rajput national state. As a consequence, all the virtues of the Rajputs - their gallantry, their spirit of self-sacrifice, their fidelity - continued to move within narrow grooves. For the lack of a common purpose, the Rajputs, who had one of the richest martial traditions in the world, not only submitted to their enemies, but became the pillars of the Mughals power. They became the instruments in defeating the one high-minded spirit among them, Rana Pratap, who defied the Mughals.

The Sikhs, on the other hand, had no martial tradition worth the name. The Sudras, who joined the Sikh movement, had been debarred by the caste system the use of arms for centuries on end. The Jats, who joined the movement, had their fighting qualities, but, as Jats they had throughout remained subservient to the Rajputs, although they were equal in number to that of the Rajputs in Rajasthan, and in a majority in Sindh.²⁴ The Khalsa continued to fight the Mughals to the bitter end till the latter were finally

vanquished. This contrast in the attitudes of the Rajputs and the Khalsa towards Mughal authority arose because of the difference in their value patterns. The Rajputs were motivated by their feudal interests and prestige; and these were adjustable in the overall Mughal feudal set up. The Khalsa were struggling to fight religious and political domination for a revolutionary cause. Hence, there was for them no room for compromise. They spurned Abdali's several offers of peace²⁵ and fined Ala Singh for having compromised with him.²⁶

The second trend of Rajput history which offers a marked contrast to the history of the Khalsa is that the mass of Rajputs had been robbed of all capacity for initiative. The patriarchal-cum-feudal constitution of their polity had made the common Rajput soldier lean heavily on his Thakur, the Thakur on his chief, and the chief on his overlord. Their tradition had also taught them to follow blindly their leaders in the same hierarchical order. Consequently, the Rajputs followed their leaders into the Mughal camp without questioning the propriety of this step. Their fidelity was linked to persons and not to a cause. Another result of it was that the Rajputs were all at sea when the Mughal empire was tottering. At that time, many upstart aspirants to political power cropped up. But, the Rajputs found it difficult to retain even whatever principalities they had. They became the plaything of the Marathas.²⁷ This happened evidently because, by their continued and long dependence on Mughal authority, even the Rajput chiefs had lost their political and military initiative. For the same reason, the Rajputs never took to guerilla warfare; because it required an inspiration and the conviction of a just-cause, and cohesion and initiative at all levels of the society. The Rajputs lacked the required inspiration and initiative.

The Khalsa, on the other hand, owed its loyalty not to persons but to a cause. The Gurus had been emphasizing this point from the very beginning. Guru Gobind Singh had bestowed leadership on the Khalsa as a whole. It was owing to their training that the Khalsa conveyed to Guru Gobind Singh that they would not follow Banda if he aspired for sovereignty. And, when he deviated from the Sikh principles, they parted company with him even though they knew that the division would be quite

hazardous for their own existence. The Khalsa fought the bitterest guerilla warfare in Indian history, even though they had no central organisation, nor a single leader. Small bands of the Khalsa, and even individuals single-handedly, carried out the prolonged struggle at their own initiative, because they were fired by a mission and had been taught to regard each one of them as equal to a lakh and a quarter of the enemy.

There is not much to choose between different peoples. It is the ideals and the value patterns that they own and strive for, which makes all the difference.

3. The Maratha Nationalism

The only militant movement against the Muslim rulers, which arose out of the fold of the caste society and in which its different component caste elements were inspired, for a time atleast, by a commonly shared sentiment of nationality, was the Maratha movement under Shivaji. Ranade has listed the factors which helped towards the development of Maharashtrian identity. But, before the advent of Shivaji on the scene, the feeling of Maratha distinctiveness was in a nebulous state without a direction of its own. Maratha contingents under their own commanders were employed in serving the interests of the Southern Pathan principalities instead of striking a course in the interests of the Marathas. Sentiment for Hindu nationalism or religion among them also appears to have been not very strong. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand why did Shivaji's father associate himself with the Karnataka expedition, 'in which the Hindu religion was ruthlessly put down, lands devastated, shrines desecrated, idols broken, women's honour violated and all the accumulated wealth of centuries drained away.'²⁸ During this dark period of Hindu history, Maharashtra provided the sinews of war to the Muslim conquerors for the enslavement of the rest of India instead of fighting valiantly 'for the ashes of her fathers and the temples of her gods'.²⁹ It is to the credit of Shivaji that he inspired the Maharashtrians with the aspirations of their own destiny, welded different Maharashtrian caste elements into a formidable force and created a great kingdom. It was an exceptional development within the caste society, because the cast is the anti-thesis of nationalism. No doubt, there were special

circumstances which favoured the development of the Maharashtrian regional nationalism. All the same, all honour is due to Shivaji for his achievement. No other Hindu personality, during the long duration of Muslim domination, had been able to match his success.

4. The Marathas and the Khalsa

There are three basic differences between the Maratha and the Sikh movement:

a) The Caste

It has been seen that the Sikh movement built a casteless society. The Maratha movement, on the other hand, never had, at any stage, the abolition of the caste system even as its aim. Shivaji issued a circular letter which enjoined on 'all members of society not to create innovation in caste practices but follow the traditional path prescribed by the Shastras.'³⁰ Shivaji was concerned chiefly with his dynastic and feudal interests, and it paid him to strengthen the orthodox reactionary mentality. The contrast in the two caste lies in the fact that whereas the Sikh revolutionary movement was egalitarian in its character, Shivaji, the architect of the Maratha movement, was tied down to the caste and Shastric ideology. It is one thing to have the right ideology and falter because of human and environmental limitations, but quite another to choose a retrograde ideology and tread a wrong path from the very beginning. Because of its adherence to orthodoxy and caste, the Maratha movement chose to move all along in a vicious circle from which it could not come out. The Peshwas had issued orders prohibiting the entry of untouchables into Poona between certain hours, lest they should pollute the Hindus of the higher castes.³¹

b) Jagirdari

The Mughal emperors of Delhi were bent upon subduing the three Pathan kingdoms of southern India. As these Pathan principalities were cut off from fresh supplies of Muslim recruits, their rulers had, for their survival, to depend heavily upon Maratha mercenaries. Large contingents of Maratha soldiers were employed in these kingdoms and their leaders came to gain high positions and Jagirs

in these Pathan states. Shivaji's father, Shahji, was one such person. He had three jagirs at different places. Shivaji inherited this Jagir as well as the Jagirdari tradition.

Before Shivaji came on the scene, the main concern of Maratha Jagirdars in the Pathan states was the preservation of their feudal interests and position. It is to the credit of Shivaji that he rejected the Path of becoming a took of the Pathan. He planned to set up his own independent state. Even greater credit is due to him for having aroused and mobilized the dormant Maratha nationalism and Hindu sentiment and having yoked it to his purpose. This is no mean achievement. In the long history of Muslim rule in India, there is no other personality who did it so successfully. But, one cannot run away from the fact that, at no time in his life, Shivaji ever gave up or thought of giving up his Jagir and Jagirdari tradition. The principal aim of Shivaji was, in the first state of his career, to save the Jagir he had inherited, in the second state to establish his Raj in the surrounding areas inhabited by the Marathas, and finally to win recognition for his Raj from the Delhi emperor.³² For his purpose, he was prepared to make compromise and even accept subordinate of the Mughals. 'As regards the Delhi Emperors, he was prepared to be their dependent vassal, if they would let his country alone. With this view, he went all the way to Delhi to make his submission, and even after he had been treacherously put in confinement, he consented to an armistice, the principal condition of which was that the Emperor should recognize him as one of the chief nobles of the Empire. The idea of forming a confederacy of Hindu powers all over India, and subverting Mussalman dominion, appeared never to have seriously been entertained by him.'³³ Jay Sinh reported to Aurangzeb that Shivaji 'sent me a long Hindi letter saying that he was a useful servant of the Imperial threshold and would readily help in the conquest of Bijapur.'³⁴ After his escape from Delhi, Shivaji wrote to Jay Sinh : 'the Emperor has cast me off; otherwise I intended to have begged him to allow me to recover Kandhar for him with my own unaided resources.'³⁵

We should like to make it clear again that Shivaji was no ordinary feudal chief. He was the father of Maratha nationalism and the founder

of a Maratha national state. But, this idea of Maratha nationalism was circumscribed by feudal concepts of those times. His Hindavi Swarajya was never conceived as divorced from himself and his descendents being its monarchs. When Shivaji was at his death bed, there was a proposal to divide his kingdom between his sons to which his elder son Santaji did not agree.³⁶ In other words, Shivaji's Swarajya was regarded as his personal property and that of his descendents which could be divided. After Shivaji, only his descendents ascended the throne although some of them were unworthy. Shivaji 'was a through autocrat, and although he freely sought advice from his ministers, he as often overruled their advice and dictated his own measures as he often overruled their advice and dictated his own measures as he thought best.'³⁷ 'The Ashta Pradhans, being virtually set aside, ceased to bear the responsibility of rule in Sambhaji's time.'³⁸ The Peshwas concentrated the whole of political power in their own hands. 'They were their own generals, their own finance ministers, and foreign ministers also.'³⁹ The office of the Peshwa also became hereditary and 'the Swarajya of Shivaji came to be transformed into the Swarajya of the Peshwas.'⁴⁰

There cannot be any comparison between the Maratha movement and the Sikh movement in the Khalsa period which aimed at capturing political power for plebian ends. There was no room in it for Jagirdari or monarchy. The Guru had bestowed leadership on the Khalsa as a whole. The Tat Khalsa parted company with Banda when he aspired to become a sovereign. We have already seen how a special convention was held to withdraw the coin struck in the personal name of Jassa Singh.⁴¹ It was no casual reaction. It was a deliberate corporate decision to curb the tendency towards supreme personal authority rearing its head.

However, feudalism did raise its head in the post-Khalsa period. We are not dealing with this period, but we should like to make the point that even this feudalism was somewhat different from the Rajput or the Maratha feudalism, both in content and form. The Rajput polity was feudalistic, pure and simple. The Maratha movement was from the very beginning a marriage between regional nationalism and feudalism. In the case of the Sikh Missals and Ranjit Singh, feudalism entered through the back-door of the revolution. This caused differences of degree and form.

The main difference was that feudalism formed its way in the post-Khalsa period cautiously and gradually, but Maratha nationalism was all along tied down to feudal personalities and institutions. Secondly, the people of different castes, who participated in the Maratha movement, did so without foregoing their castes. The net result was that the effective leadership remained throughout in the hands of the feudals and the upper castes. It is to them, the Brahmins and Prabhus, that the political power and its attendant advantage, by and large, gravitated. The Sikh movement was, on the other hand, reared on plebian ideals. Feudalism had to strike its roots among masses who had tasted freedom, equality and fraternity. Even in the post-Khalsa period, it is the Jats and a carpenter who became the leaders of the Missals but not a single man from the upper castes could do so. This shift of political power from the upper strata to the lower strata of society was un-heard of in the caste context. In the post-revolutionary period, the Sikh chiefs could not afford to be so autocratic in exercising political power or in monopolizing land as the feudals with established feudal traditions could be. There is the contemporary evidence of Hugel who states : 'The chiefs of these missals were, properly, only the commanders of the troops in their general enterprises, but they were always the most considerable men in the Missal. Each individual horseman, however, had some property, whether small or large, and was, in truth, an arbitrary chief, who formed a member of the Missal, just as it suited his own pleasure, or when some common interest was at stake.'⁴² Forster, another contemporary, writes : 'I find an embarrassment in applying a distinct term to the form of the Sicoue government, which, on the first view, bears an appearance of aristocracy, but a closer examination discovers a large vein of popular power branching through many of its parts... An equality of rank is maintained in their civil society which, no class of man, however wealthy or powerful, is suffered to break down.'⁴³ Even Ranjit Singh was conscious of the strong democratic traditions of the Khalsa, and was circumspect in not offending openly their susceptibilities on this score. The Khalsa was addressed as 'Khalsa Jeo', and his government was called Sarkar-i-Khalsajeo (i.e. the government of the Khalsa). He never ventured to sit formally on a throne, and his official seal did

not bear his name. This shows the contrast between the caste society which required Shivaji to legitimize his status as a king and the Sikh society even in the post-revolutionary period when autocracy was trying to strike roots against a plebian background. Ranjit Singh was afraid of the Khalsa traditions and the Akalis, and took care to keep them in good humour. All this demeanour was, of course, partly tactical. But, hypocrisy, as the saying goes, is the homage vice pays to virtue. Where there is no virtue, this homage becomes superfluous. We do not find such a parallel in the Rajput or Maratha history, because there was no plebian tradition to be appeased. After Ranjit Singh, the levers of power shifted into the hands of the five-men committees chosen by the army units. It had its unfortunate aspects; but what we want to point out is, how strong the democratic Sikh tradition was that it could reassert itself even after it had received a set-back.

CHAPTER XVIII

A Plebian Revolution

Reform and revolution are relative terms. Both imply improvement and change for the better existing conditions. But, whereas a revolutionary movement seeks to change the fundamental basis of an existing order, a reformist movement tinkers with the problem and is content with minor changes here and there. Secondly, whether a movement is revolutionary or reformist has to be judged keeping into view the background in which it arises and the situation in which it operates. The possibilities of social, political or economic developments that the Industrial Revolution and the Capitalist system opened could not be envisaged in the feudal age. The Sikh movement, therefore, has to be seen in the context of the times in which it worked and not in the light of the later developments of the modern period. It has to be assessed by the wide gap between what it stood for and what it sought to change.

We shall compare the Sikh movement with some of the great revolutionary movements of the feudal era. In making such comparisons, we would in no way like to minimize the invaluable contributions of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam in furthering human values of freedom and equality. The French Revolution remains a source of inspiration to this day. All the progressive movements, including the Sikh movement, are the monopoly of no sect or nation. They form the common cherished heritage of the whole humanity.

1. A Social Revolution

(a) *Social Involvement*

Sikhism regards the world as real and not as a bondage or

an illusion. It also takes a unitary view of life which does not admit of any dichotomy between its various spheres of activity (Chapter IX). As a consequence, full participation in life and in the solution of its problems became a primary Sikh concern. Moksha or spiritual bliss for its own sake is not the Sikh ideal. This is not a minor departure; it is a complete reversal of the previous India tradition. Only Mahayana Buddhism made the elimination of human suffering from inherent doctrinal limitations. The world, for Mahayana Buddhism, as for all Buddhist creeds, was a place of unmitigated suffering, therefore, release from it remained the ultimate goal. Secondly, active participation in its programme was limited to the order of the monks. Thirdly, the Buddhist interpretation and implementation of the doctrine of Ahimsa prescribed the limits beyond which the monks could not step out to solve the social and political problems of the society. Generally, all Indian sects had been precluding the house-holder from becoming a Sanyasi or a monk. In contrast, and as if to emphasize a complete break with the Indian tradition, the second and the third Gurus specifically excluded the ascetics (Udasis) from joining the Sikh ranks. Those few Indian sects which later allowed the householder to join their higher religious orders conceded it as a concession. But, in Sikhism it was almost a religious obligation.

(b) The Doctrine of Ahimsa

The doctrine of Ahimsa was interpreted and implemented in a manner that favoured the maintenance of the prevalent social and political systems. Thus, religion became the handmaid of social and political reaction. The caste ideology directly sanctified the caste order and the political domination of a few favoured castes. Buddhism and Jainism did so indirectly. For, the Ahimsa doctrine eschewed the revolutionary means for demolishing such unjust orders. But, for the Sikhs Gurus it was the duty of religion to overthrow all unjust social and political orders, if necessary, by revolutionary means.

(c) Abolition of Caste

The orthodox creeds were indissolubly linked with the caste

ideology and the caste system. Jainism compromised with caste in order to save itself from orthodox persecution.¹ Buddhist ideology struck at the roots of the caste by severing from Vedic scriptural authority and the prerogatives based on birth. But, the Buddhist did not abolish castes. Rather, they fully acknowledged it as a social institution.² Lord Buddha and Asoka's edicts inculcated veneration for the Brahmins. Some of the medieval Bhaktas were anti-caste, but they stopped short at declaring their ideological stand. The Caste-system was not merely an ideology; it was a social system. A social system can be supplanted only by another social system. The Radical Bhaktas, somehow, did not proceed to work in a deliberate and a planned manner to break away from the caste society and to build a new one outside it. Only the Sikh Gurus did it (Chapter XI).

(d) *The Status of Women*

The low position assigned to women by the caste society needs no further comments. Digambra Jainism considered that women had to be reborn as men before they could attain their ultimate liberation. Buddhism declared that a monk was not to lend a helping hand to a woman even if his own mother or wife was drowning.³ The Pope declared in the year 1979 that the Christian tradition prohibited the ordination of women as priests.⁴ Islam's attitude towards women-folk is well-known. The French Revolution throughout excluded women from the right of franchise.⁵ When Guru Amar Das organized diocese for the spread of Sikh religion, women were made in-charge of these along with men.⁶ Mai Bhago rallied those revolutionaries who had faltered from their revolutionary resolve and led them in the battle of Khidrana (Mukatsar). The Islamic Shariat interdicted against entrusting government to women,⁷ but Sikh women became the leaders of Missals in the post-revolutionary period. (Chapter XI).

(e) *Social Fraternization*

The degree of social equality and fraternization achieved by the Sikh movement during its revolutionary phase was indeed remarkable (Chap. XI). Not only the Sikhs regarded each other as brothers (Bhai),

the Gurus, also in their letters to the Sikhs (Hukamname), addressed them in the same manner. This feature of the movement is so prominent that it has come to the notice of Toynbee, who writes : 'Like all converts to Islam, all converts to Sikhism became one another's brothers and peers in virtue of their having all alike given their allegiance to one Lord whom they had been taught to worship as the sole true Living Lord.'⁸

Except the Islamic society, whose record in this respect is praiseworthy, the Sikh revolutionary movement compares favourably with other similar movements. Considering the caste milieu in which it had to work, its achievements are all the more remarkable. In the case of Islam, too, it was lucky that it was born and level of primitive communism.⁹ The abolition of slavery by the American Revolution was no mean achievement, but the Negroes are prohibited, or atleast prevented, from using the same public amenities as are available to whitemen.¹⁰ This social gulf between Negro and white citizens of the U.S.A. has remained despite the enlightening and liberalizing influences of Christianity, the Western culture and the capitalist economy. In the U.S.A., it is only the colour and racial prejudices against the Negroes that had to be overcome. The Sikh movement had to surmount the stigmas of the caste ideology, which, it was postulated, even god Indra himself was helpless to erase, as in the case of the story of Matanga.

The revolutionary France had not to face, within France, the like of the racial problem met in the U.S.A., or the like of the knotty social problem which the caste society posed in India. Slavery in French colonies was maintained by the Constituents and was abolished by the Jacobins only in 1794¹¹, to be restored again afterwards. The French Revolution did not envisage female liberation. "Women who attempted to find a place in the *sans-culotte* ranks which went beyond rhetorical expressions of solidarity, or the traditional roles of women in giving a special fervour to public demonstrations and attending to the warriors's repose at other times, received short shrift. They were for a time to be seen at some club and section meetings, but did not lead them. The *sans-cullote* by no means envisaged the total overturning of the social

order attributed to him by the most alarmed of the reactionaries.¹² The words 'Liberty' and 'Equality' became common at the same time, but 'fraternity' 'was only to join them later and never acquired their popularity'.¹³ In fact, the French Revolution was more of a political revolution rather than a social revolution. The slogan of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' had great inspirational value, but the content of 'liberty' and 'equality' was determined by class interests even at the height of the revolutionary period. 'The Declaration of Rights is remarkable in that it neatly balances a statement of universal principles and human rights with an evident concern for the interests of the bourgeoisies... Equality is presented in largely political terms... no mention is made of slavery and slave trade... The Declaration then, for all its nobility of language and its proclamation of universal principles, is essentially a manifesto of the revolution of bourgeoisie and its clerical and liberal-aristocratic allies.'¹⁴ As the French Revolution, even at its height, was dominated by class interests, there was little of that emotional integration which the Sikh revolutionaries acquired through their long training in the Sikh ideology and through their relentless struggle for its fulfilment. When the sans-culottes, who usually led the vanguard in mass demonstrations or insurrections, could not concede equality of status to their own womenfolk, how could they be expected to fraternize with the lower strata of journeymen, wage-earners, house-servants and the unemployed?

The circumstances in which the French and Sikh revolutions took place were materially different. Therefore, it would be a mistake to apply the same yardstick in assessing them. The caste ideology and the caste society were the anti-thesis of social equality and political liberty. By giving religious sanction to caste distinctions and degradation, the caste ideology had completely succeeded in making the subject castes mentally accept their social inferiority and political subjugation. They were made to believe that it was a sin even to aspire for any status other than the one assigned to them by their birth in the caste hierarchy. This was the reason why the legitimization of a superior caste status by the Brahmins was so eagerly sought by the rulers: and this was how the political power became subservient to the

priestly caste. There was no scope, much less a fertile soil, for concerted action on the basis of class interests, because classes were bedevilled by caste considerations at every step. Had it not been so, Indian history might have taken quite a different turn. In many cases, the same class consisted of different castes, each one of which was concerned more with the preservation of its own exclusiveness rather than with the furtherance of the common class interests.¹⁵ There was no pronounced regional nationalism in the Punjab either, which could inspire the people to united action. There is hardly any noteworthy instance in history when the people of the Punjab made common cause against a foreign enemy in the manner the people of Maharashtra under Shivaji did. In these circumstances, the innate yearning of the human spirit for equality and liberty could not find any ready expression on its own. The Enlightenment and the Reformation had prepared the Europeans for that liberation of the human spirit of which the French Revolution was only a more prominent symptom. Compared to the reversal of the orthodox ideology which the Radical Bhatas advocated, Luther's innovations in the interpretation of the Christian doctrine are not so radical. But, Protestantism touched off a wave of liberalism and generated a momentum which overflowed the bounds of religion and influenced freed of ideas and action in social and political spheres. In India, one has only to read the latest official reports on Scheduled Castes to realize the extent of the hold which caste still exercises despite the influence of the medieval Bhakti movement, Islam and the Western culture. There could be only one explanation for this rigid resistance to the ideas of human equality in India. In Europe, the human spirit was not cowed down to the same extent as it was in India. There people suffered by and large, from class domination, the various manifestations of feudalism and absolute monarchism. In India, the masses were, in addition, enslaved psychologically by the caste ideology and physically by the inexorable mechanism of the caste society.

The Sikh movement was faced with an uphill task. It had first to wean away people from the purely individualistic approach to religion and yoke them for the achievement of social and political goals. It had also to overcome the inhibitions which the wrong

interpretation of the doctrine of Ahimsa created in the way of revolutionary action. Above all, caste shackles had to be broken in order to bring the masses together on one platform. The Sikh ideology made the Brahmins and Khattris pay respect to the Jat Masand, and the Jats to regard the village menials and outcastes as their brothers. In the French Revolution, 'fraternity' could be added to 'Liberty and Equality' at a later stage, and it could still carry on in its own way. The Sikh Revolution had to reach its plebian goals through 'fraternity'. It has been shown that caste was characterized by a degree of mutual repulsion and antagonism not be matched in class societies. The greater the resistance, the greater is the effort needed to overcome it. This mutual repulsion between castes could not be overcome by mere slogans of 'Liberty and Equality'. The mutually hostile caste elements could be welded together for a plebian cause only through a complete identification with the new cause and ideals. 'Other leaders, grocers, carpenters, oil men, men of all trades, besides yeomen from the countrywide, rallied bands and fought fiercely, so well had Govind and Pahal (baptism) amalgamated discordant elements for a time.'^{15a}

De Tocqueville states in his well-known treatise *L' Ancien Regime* that, 'The French in 1789 made the greatest effort in which any people has ever committed itself, to cut, so to speak their destiny in two, and to separate by an abyss that which had hitherto been from that which they wished henceforth to be.'¹⁶ The abyss that separated the spirit of freedom, equality and independence attained by the Sikh Revolution (Chap. XI) from what the situation was in the previous society was far wider than what Tocqueville talks about. Forster attests to it that 'the Khalsa Siques, even of the lowest order, possess a haughtiness of deportment.'¹⁷ Haughtiness is not approved by the Sikh ideology, but an exaggerated sense of self-respect is understandable among the ranks who had for centuries never known of it, for it is not easy to maintain an even balance when there is a sudden rise from a lower status to a higher one. In one case, it shows the wide distance the Sikh society had moved away from the area of caste servility. Except in the case

of Islam, which had no caste background, few societies have raised common people from the lowest social level to the level of equality and fraternity achieved by the Sikh movement. Lepel Griffen expresses the opinion that; 'The Sikh theocracy had equality and fraternity for its foundations far more literally than has been the case with the modern republics of Europe and America.'^{17a}

2. A Plebian Revolution

The Sikh movement was not only social revolution, it was also a plebian political revolution. We cannot have a proper appreciation of the revolutionary and plebian character of the Sikh revolution unless we compare it with the classic example of the French Revolution (of 1783-1815, i.e. of the feudal era in France). Its comparison with an Indian movement would have been more appropriate because the environmental context would have been more or less common. But, in the medieval period, there has been no revolutionary movement of India origin.

(a) Plebian Goals

On the eve of the French Revolution, there was no clear view of its aims in France.¹⁸ Much less was it conceived,^{18a} planned or pursued as a plebian revolution in the manner of the Bolshevik Russian Revolution, which had well-defined revolutionary objectives and a disciplined party committed to achieve them. It is true that Rousseau had advocated the idea of 'the sovereignty of the people' and the slogan of 'Liberty and Equality' was very much in the air. These ideas and concepts, no doubt, formed an ideological emotive component of the French Revolution. But, these ideas and concepts, in their practical implications, meant different things to different people. "The patricians began the Revolution", wrote Chateaubriand, 'the plebians finished it.' But, they did not finish it in plebian interests, because there was no organized part or leadership to put a plebian content into those slogans, ideas and concepts, in fact, none of the French political thinkers had shown any marked concern for the 'lower orders' or the 'Fourth Estate'.¹⁹ Rousseau would have nothing to do with the underprivileged

'natives of Geneva' when they sought his aid.²⁰ In the light of his conduct in this matter, Rude is, perhaps, not wrong in his surmise that 'had Rousseau lived, he might well have condemned the Parisian sans-culottes for the use made of his teachings as forthrightly as Luther had, 270 years earlier, condemned the German peasants.'²¹ The Estates General was summoned in 1789 not for a reformist, much less for a revolutionary purpose, but for solving the fiscal crisis into which France had landed itself. And it was the aristocracy which forced the king to summon the Estates General.^{21a} Without the problem of public finance, there would not have been a revolution.²² Hence, the French Revolution was wayward in its course, not so much because of the exterior opposition it had to encounter, but because of its own internal weakness born out of the lack of fixed revolutionary purpose and direction.

The Sikh Revolution was the product of an ideology which from its very inception had identified itself with the 'lowest of the low,'²³ and which had forcefully and consistently been pursued for over 250 years.

(b) *Plebian Base*

The summoning of the Estates General in 1789 opened the Pandora's box, as it brought into the open the class conflicts of the three Estates in a manner which nobody had anticipated. The subsequent history of French Revolution revolves mainly around the various combinations and permutations that continued to take different shapes among the three Estates in order to gain political leverage for safeguarding their respective class interests. Interestingly, the King, at one stage, joined hands with the Third Estate as against his own nobility. By January 1789, it was no longer a constitutional contest between the King and the privileged classes but 'a war between the Third Estate and the two other orders.'²⁴ The Third Estate was, however, by no means a plebian force, pure and simple. It embraced at one end millionaires who had far greater interests in common with the rich noblemen than with the poorest peasants at the other end.²⁵ It was definitely dominated by the middle classes. The urban bourgeoisie captured the great bulk of the seats among the deputies of the Third Estate that went to

represent their order at Versailles in 1789; some 25% were lawyers, 5% were other professional men, 13% were industrialists, merchants and bankers; at most 7 to 9% were agriculturists, and even of these only a handful were peasants.²⁶ The Assembly or National Convention, which met on the 20th Sept., 1799, socially 'differed little from the members of the two preceding parliaments; there was a similar preponderance of former officials, lawyers, merchants and businessmen as before, there were no small peasants, and there were only two working men of their number...'²⁷ The Jacobins were the most radical group within the Assemblies and the sans-culottes were in the van of revolutionary demonstrations and insurrections. 'If anyone was bourgeois, Jacobins were;'^{27a} and shopkeepers and master-craftsmen, not the lower order, were the backbone of the san-culottes.^{27b}

As against this, the plebian base of the Khalsa has been shown in chapter XII.

(c) *Modus Operandi*

The French Revolution is a remarkable series of historical events that continues to inspire to this day because of the mass upsurge of the revolutionary spirit which rose in its yearning for human liberty and equality. It is the people of the orders lower than the Third Estate, called by some writers as the Fourth Estate, which look a leading part in the mass demonstrations and insurrections, but it is the middle classes which derived the maximum advantage out of these mass interventions. This happened mainly because of two reasons. The French Revolution was not a people's direct revolution in the sense that the insurrectionists never attempted, rather never conceived, to capture political power in their own hands. They looked to, or at best pressurized, the higher orders to concede their demands through constitutional channels. Secondly, the Fourth Estate had not yet developed a sufficient consciousness of their real political interests and had not thrown up a leadership of its own alive and committed to these interests. 'On the whole wage workers had no clear consciousness of class. If they had, it is very doubtful whether the Revolution of 1789 would have been possible... probably the bourgeoisie, as happened later in Germany, would have shunned the support of such formidable allies.'^{27c}

When the King was persuaded by the Court party to agree to quash the Assembly's decree of 17th June and to overcome the Third Estate by a display of force, thousands of Parisians invaded the Courtyard of Chateau and compelled the King to yield. The above event was the first eye-opener as to what the direct intervention of the people could achieve. Its significance was not lost upon the bourgeois and middle classes, and, hence-forward, they made full use of popular pressure to serve their interests. 'Up to now the revolutionary temper developing in Paris had been without effective leadership. With the latest news from Versailles (i.e. the King had yielded to popular pressure), however, the professional/commercial classes, who had been prepared to await events and viewed the simmerings in the faubourgs and markets without sympathy, began to give a direction to affairs without which the July revolution could hardly have taken place.²⁸ But, the bourgeois and middle classes were equally determined not to let this genie get out of their control. The Paris electors 'formed a permanent committee to act as a provisional government of the city and determined to put a stop to the indiscriminate arming of the whole population. To them the bands of unemployed and homeless... were as great a menace to the security and properties of the citizens as the Court and privileged orders conspiring at Versailles.'²⁹ It was with both these threats in mind that they no organized a citizens' militia, or garde nationale, from which all 'vagrants and homeless persons, (gens sane aveu) and even a large part of the settled wage-earners were specifically excluded; it was as Barnave said, to be "bonne bourgeoise".³⁰ Similarly, the fall of Bastille under the mass upsurge saved the National Assembly and the second intervention of the people of Paris on 5th October consolidated the gains of the July revolution. Yet, 'once the insurrection had served its purpose, the Assembly took steps to curb the revolutionary energies of the Parisian menu people by imposing martial law, the death penalty for rebellion and a censorship of the radical press.'³¹ The Brissotin party, which had demagogically aroused the sections and faubourgs to demonstrate against the monarchy, 'drew back in support of the King; they had not bargained for a Republic that would be at the mercy of the votes and weapons of the hitherto 'passive' citizens, or sans-

culottes.’³² The Gironde succeeded in persuading the Assembly to disband the ‘revolutionary’ commune that had usurped authority on the eve of the August revolution.³³ The Jacobins, who came nearest to an alliance with the common people, were also predominantly *bons bourgeois*.³⁴ When the *sans-culottes* reacted against the sharp rise in the prices of food and consumer goods and invaded the shops, the City Council, the Jacobin Club and the parties in the Convention all joined in denouncing this infringement of the sacred rights of property.³⁵ Finally, the *sans-culottes* were politically silenced by purging and converting the commune into a Robespierist stronghold and by disbanding the *Parisain arme revolutionnaire*. Robespierre’s own fall from power was in no small measure due to the wage-earners hostility he had earned and the apathy of the *sans-culottes* whom he had alienated by his policies.³⁶

It was on the strength of the pressure and intervention of the Fourth Estate that the Third Estate succeeded in wresting political power from the King and the other two orders and in establishing the Bourgeois Republic. Had the plebian masses been conscious that their salvation lay in capturing political power and keeping it in their own hands, and that ultimate power lay within their easy reach, they would not have wasted their revolutionary zeal in saving this Assembly and that Convention, or in pinning their faith in bourgeois leaders and parties. But, throughout the French Revolution, the people of the Fourth Estate were preoccupied with comparatively minor issues like wage hikes, control of the prices of bread and consumer goods, the extension of franchise, etc. Not even once the acquisition of political power in their own hands was made a primary issue.

As against all this, there was never any doubt in the mind of the Khalsa about its plebian mission, and that the mission was to be fulfilled by them by capturing power in its own hands by a direct armed struggle.^{36a}

The predominantly plebian composition of the Khalsa has already been noted (Chap. XII). Those of the higher castes who joined the Khalsa did so after accepting the Khalsa ideology; because they had to take vows to this effect at the time of the baptism ceremony. And nobody could be admitted without

baptization.³⁷ It is significant that some Sikhs drawn from the Brahmin and Khatri castes, who could not accept the ideals of the Khalsa and who did not want to shed caste prejudices, parted company on the very occasion the Khalsa was created.³⁸ Within the Khalsa ranks, the spirit of equality was a vital principle,³⁹ and a Brahmin had no higher claim to eminence than the lowest Sudra who used to sweep his house.⁴⁰

The quality of leadership of a movement and the consciousness of its ideals are even more important than its class or caste composition, because these determine its character and control its direction. The insurrectionists in the French Revolution were drawn mostly from the Fourth Estate, but, for lack of leadership and the consciousness of plebian aims, the fruits were always gathered by the senior orders. The singleminded manner in which the revolutionary ideals of the Khalsa were pursued during the revolutionary period is remarkable (Chapter XIV and XV) This was in no small measure due to the deep commitment of the leadership as well as the rank and file to the revolution and its plebian ideals.

The cooperation of the hill Rajas in fighting the Mughal Empire would have been very valuable, but Guru Gobind Singh specifically laid it down as a condition that the Rajas must first accept the ideology as well as the leadership of the Khalsa.⁴¹ The Khalsa accepted the leadership of Banda only on the condition that he would not aspire to sovereignty. And, when he tended to seek sovereignty, they parted company with him.⁴² The Guru and the disciple were each other's subordinates (*EK dusre ka tabedar hua*).^{42a} Bhai Gurdas, the second, has written a Vaar on this theme saying that Guru Gobind Singh combined guruship and discipleship in one.^{42b}

What is even more remarkable is that the Khalsa leadership was extended to all levels including the lowest castes. The Gurus had deliberately worked to that end. We should specially recall Narang's comments about the significance of Guru Gobind Singh's request to the Panj Piyaras to baptize him in the same manner as he had baptized them earlier. The conferment of Guruship/leadership on the Khalsa was the climax in this direction. But, this was subject to the Khalsa accepting Guru Granth as their Guru. In other words, the direction of the movement was fixed by the Sikh

ideals embodied in the Guru Granth and its execution was entrusted only to those committed to those ideals. When Guru Gobind Singh appointed Banda as the Chief leader he was directed to regard himself as the servant of the Khalsa and follow the advice of the five men the Guru appointed for the purpose. "All Sikhs were theoretically equal; their religion in its first youth was too pure a theocracy to allow distinctions of rank among its adherents."^{42c} It became an article of faith with the Khalsa that wherever five of the Khalsa, committed to Sikh ideals, met to take a decision, the Guru was present there in spirit to guide them.⁴³ It was to this level that the leadership was spread. It was this spirit and faith which sustained the movement when the Khalsa guerillas were split up and scattered into small groups without a central or common leadership. Writing on the election of Kapur Singh as a leader, Arjan Das Malik comments: 'It is a paradox of Sikh history that a man who was elected in this cavalier fashion later proved to be the most competent leader that the Sikhs could ever had. This can be explained only in one way. Such was the uniform high standard of motivation and training that each one of the Khalsa was as good a commander as he was a soldier.'⁴⁴ It was the wide consciousness of the issues at stake and the extension of the sense of responsibility and leadership to a broad base that gave consistent direction and tenacity of purpose to the Sikh Revolution. The Mughal authorities had come to believe more than once that they had exterminated the Khalsa to the last man; but the Khalsa 'always appeared, like a suppressed flame, to rise into higher splendour from every attempt to crush them.'^{44a} And it was due to a lack of understanding of the issues at stake and a leadership from their own ranks committed to these issues that the sans-culottes could not give a plebian direction to the French Revolution.

One of the reasons why the Khalsa reached such a 'uniform high standard of motivation and training' was that the Sikh movement depended, for the achievement of its objectives, entirely upon revolutionary activities. It was not distracted by reformist or constitutional illusions. Unlike France, here there were no constitutional channels through which the subjects of the Mughal State could seek the fulfilment of their aspirations, much less a share in

political power. Guru Arjan had set the ball rolling by courting martyrdom in pursuance of an 'open profession of his faith.' Guru Gobind Singh assigned such symbols to every member of the Khalsa that he became a living insignia, distinguishable from a distance, of the 'open revolution' he launched. It was a direct confrontation between the Mughal state and the Khalsa. There were no illusions on either side. At least, the Sikhs knew that there could be no compromise between their revolution and the established order it wanted to overthrow.⁴⁵ The Khalsa spurned Abdali's offer of a compromise and fined Ala Singh for accepting honour from him.⁴⁶ The Rehatnamas are full of injunctions warning the Singhs not to have any contact with the Mughals (Turk) at any level whatsoever.⁴⁷ They are required to remain armed at all times and to be at guard against the enemy even when performing their natural functions.⁴⁸ This was how the Sikh Revolution was conceived as an armed struggle perpetuum.

The character of the Sikh Revolution as a direct armed struggle is also confirmed by the high price in blood and sufferings it had to pay. In this regard the French Revolution stands no comparison. The fall of Bastille is remembered as a great event and turning point in the history of the French Revolution. Its garrison consisted of only 80 superannuate soldiers, reinforced by 30 Swiss. The revolutionaries who stormed it suffered 98 casualties in killed and 73 wounded; whereas only one of the old soldiers was hit.^{48a} The demonstrators of Germinal dispersed without offering any resistance when Merlin of Thionville appeared at the head of loyal troops. The popular revolt or Prairial was one of the most stubborn resistance offered; but in the end the faubourg surrendered without a shot when invested by troops. A military commission tried 149 persons and sentenced 36 to death and 37 to prison and deportation. There were further proscriptions and arrests but no-large scale executions of the revolutionaries. 'It was an important turning-point. With the proscription and removal of its leaders (both actual and potential) the Parisian sans-culottes ceased to exist as a political and military force.'^{48b} With that ceased to exist the spearhead of the French Revolution of 1783-1815. And a little later, Bonaparte's famous 'whiff of grapeshot' fully established the

reactionary forces in the saddle. It opened the way for the Bourgeois Republic itself to melt into monarchy via the Directorate and the Consulate.

The high price paid by the Sikh Revolution is an open book. The contrast between the French Revolution and the Sikh Revolution in this respect is not a contrast between the courage of the French revolutionaries and that of the Khalsa. The difference is due to the clear perception of the revolutionary aims and the revolutionary means. The Khalsa had that perception whereas the sans-culottes and the other revolutionary forces in the French Revolution lacked that. The difference is also due to the intensity with which the Khalsa leadership and the rank and file had committed themselves to the revolutionary cause. In fact, those alone could remain in the Khalsa who were prepared to sacrifice their lives; because it was an 'open revolution' which admitted of no camouflage or retreat.

(d) *Political Power*

When the Khalsa captured political power for the first time under Banda, as already quoted, 'the lowest of low in Indian estimation' were appointed rulers, and Bir Singh, a man of low origin, was made the first governor of the territory the Khalsa occupied.^{48c} In the Missal period, ordinary peasants, shepherds (Tara Singh Gaiba)⁴⁹, village menials (carpenters) and distillers (a despised caste) became the leaders. There was not one from castes higher than these. The common peasantry of the land suddenly attained the political power.⁵⁰ Forster writes : 'The civil and military government of the Siques, before a common interest had ceased to actuate its operations, was conducted by general and limited assemblies, which presided over the different departments of the state.'⁵¹ Even when feudalistic tendencies had started setting in the Missal system, there were 'at no stage of Sikh feudal history, a haughty noblesse, as in Rajputana or a medieval Europe... The Punjab system was not feudal in the European sense. The all-prevading sense of brotherhood and a super-added theocratic outlook would not, atleast in theory, allow distinctions of rank.'^{51a} The leaders of the Missals were more *de jure* than *de factor* chiefs, because their followers were mostly friends and volunteers who regarded themselves

as their companions and partners.⁵² We have already referred to Forster's observation that an ordinary member of the Khalsa did not regard himself as anybody's servant except his Guru's.⁵³ The Sikh society was very much circumspect in safeguarding its internal equality.⁵⁴ This was the reason why Ranjit Singh had to camouflage his monarchy. He knew that he merely directed into a particular channel a power which he could neither destroy nor control⁵⁵. 'Free followers of Gobind could not be the observant slaves of an equal member of the Khalsa. Ranjit Singh concealed his motives and 'everything was done for the sake of the Guru for the advantage of the Khalsa and in the name of the Lord.'⁵⁶

He never installed himself on the throne as a king. In the very first public Darbar he declared that his government would be styled as the Sarkar-i-Khalsa.⁵⁷ After Ranjit Singh, effective political power did not remain in the hands of his descendants or chiefs. The elected army panchayats usurped executive authority under the designation of 'Panth Khalsa Jeo.'⁵⁸ However, feudalism is after all feudalism. But, the ruins of a monument have sometimes their own tale to tell about its previous grandeur.

As against it, what the French Revolution achieved was the establishment of a bourgeois Republic. At no stage, common peasants and the sans-culottes, much less social strata lower than these, came near to wielding political power directly or indirectly. Guru Gobind Singh 'opened, at once, to men of the lowest tribe, the prospect of earthly glory.'⁵⁹ 'Grocers, carpenters, oilmen....rallied into bands...so well Gobind amalgamated discordant elements for a time.'⁶⁰ In the French Revolution, even the sans-culottes, who were in the van of revolutionary insurrection, would not join on equal terms, the wage-earners, the homeless and the like.

(e) *Zamindari (Land-lordism)*

One of the great achievements of the French Revolution was that it abolished feudal institutions. But, as this was also done through constitutional channels, it made a difference from the way it was done by the Sikh Revolution. It had important consequences. The French peasants were so much obsessed by the norms of the old order that, in their uprisings during the

Revolution, they believed that, in settling accounts with their seigneurs, they were carrying out the King's wishes, if not his specific instructions.⁶¹ In any case, there was no organized attempt to directly seize the land from the landlords and redistribute it among the commoners. 'Nobles who stayed in France, and remained peaceable, never at any time during the Revolution, saw their property threatened.'^{61a} The one great occasion when the redistribution of land took place was when estates of the Church were nationalized and put up for public auction. But, it was the bourgeoisie, or the rich peasants, who benefitted, for they alone could raise the bid. Later, 'some peasants (through a minority) had been able to benefit from the sale of biens nationaux, particularly after the law of June 1793 had made it possible, for a short while, for village to band together to bid together for smaller lots.'⁶² The majority of the aristocracy, though shorn height of the Jacobin Terror.⁶³ There is no doubt that the abolition of feudal institutions (feudal privileges and levies, etc.) by the French Revolution ushered in a new era in the rural society of France, but, 'the transfer of land between classes had been on a relatively modest scale; and it was the bourgeoisie rather than the peasantry that had reaped the main reward; the losers were the Church rather than the nobility and those least favoured were the poorest peasants.'⁶⁴

Dr. Ganda Singh has expressed the view that the Khalsa under Banda abolished the zamindari system and established peasant proprietorship in land.^{64a} 'The Sikhs when they hold land at all hold it usually as proprietors and seldom as tenants. This is but natural as they were once the masters of the country.'⁶⁵ We will, however, limit ourselves to that evidence which shows in general terms that the revolutionary Khalsa worked for the uplift of the unprivileged classes and against the established vested interests.

Khushwaqt Rai has written in his history 'Tarikh-i-Sikhan' (1811): "... and after that, as the saying goes—hemistich: men disappeared and God's own country was captured by an ass; the sect of Singhs took possession of the country of the Punjab. Since then, upto this time the whole administrative machinery of the country is in disarray and the normal system of governance, official codes, the set up of levies and awards... and the allowance occurring from estates bestowed

by Kinds and nobles were abolished for the people. The lowest of the low-bred and the meanest of the mean people got elevated to high government positions. The nobility and gradees retired to secluded places on account of the elimination of their tribe. The progeny, i.e. the nobility, left the (course) of learning and literature and picked up the life-style of the low-breds. The (blind) pursuit of such manners led to insurrection and a number of local chieftains sprang up. These chieftains do not molest the mass of the people. Chieftainship not divided into each house and the zamindar of each village became a commandant. Now this mischief has proliferated to such an extent that each family has one or two Singhs. There must be around 2 lakhs of Singhs in the Punjab. Many of them are in service, others are settled in their homes and earn their livelihood through small scale industry, trade and agriculture. The supremacy of these people began with effect from the Bikrami year one thousand and eight hundred and twentyfour, i.e. 40 years ago. During this period many persons belonging to this sect have risen from penury to regal status and due to the accidents of fate have stretched their feet in the sheet of changes. Thus has appeared all this concourse of the Khalsa chiefs in the country of the Punjab..."^{65a}

Here is a translation of one extract taken from 'Imadud-Saadat' written by Syed Ghulam Ali Khan:

"To cut the matter short, at present, the whole country of the Punjab... is in the possession of this community and most of their exalted leaders are of low origin, such as carpenters, animal skin-treaters and Jats."^{65b}

The author of Haqiqat writes (1784-85): '*Sikhan b istiklal-i-taman mulk-ra abad kar dand w firqa-i-sipahi w ashraf hama ra wiren sakhtand w rayyat w ahl-i-hirfa ra razi kardand*'.

'On attaining power the Sikhs repopulated the whole country. They dispersed the ashraf (the privileged feudal classes), and the firqa-i-sipahi (the soldier class represented by mansabdars and faujdars) and conciliated the rayyat (the tillers of the soil) and the ahl-i-hirfa (the

* The parts given in Italics in this para are either blurred in the original or their meaning is not quite clear.

artisans and the craftsmen, i.e. the working classes)'.^{65c}

According to the same author, the Guru 'sought to uplift the qaum-i-arazil i.e. the downtrodden. He was keen on inflicting khift (humiliation) on the mardum-i-avvan (the privileged classes).^{65d}' The author of Asrari Samdi states, though in a hyperbolic style, that there was not a single amir (rich man or noble) in Hindustan whom Banda spared.⁶⁶ This statement tallies with that of Bhai Gurdas, the second, that the Khalsa scattered to the winds the Zamindars and the amirs,⁶⁷ and with that of the contemporary Muslim saint Bulle Shah:

The Mughals drank the cup of poison,
The Coarse-blanket-wearers were raised to be rajas (rulers).
The Mughal nobles are all wandering, about in silence,
Well have they been swept off.^{67a}

It is stated in the 'Haqiqat' that "Asan baz Sikhian mulk ra baham taqism kardand",^{67b} i.e. the Sikh divided the country among themselves. This historical testimony and the other given above finds support from a different quarter. Soon after the annexation of the Punjab, the British authorities started investigations regarding its customary laws. Mr. Tuper, who bases his opinions on these investigations, reaches the conclusion that "the general result of the Sikh rule was to destroy the old tenures of the country" and "reduce squatters and inheritors to same level."^{67c} Prinsep writes: "when the country, overrun by the Sikhs had been parcelled out into new allotments, the former divisions into districts, as established during the reign of the Delhi Emperors, and recorded by the Kanungos, or rule-tellers, became void, and much angry litigation arose in respect to the village boundaries and waste lands."^{67d} This apparently refers to land redistribution. That the land seized from the landlords by the Khalsa was distributed among the poorer classes goes without saying. Even if it is assumed that the acquired land was distributed among the members of the Khalsa, it has been shown

* We have been able to tap, with the help of friends and well-wishers very limited Persian source-material

chat the Khalsa was predominantly plebian in its composition. Besides there are indications that the Khalsa at one stage regarded the acquired property as the common property of the Khalsa Commonwealth. Forster has written: 'The amounts of contributions levied on the public account was reported to this assembly, and divided among the chiefs proportionately to the number of their troops. They were at the same time obliged to distribute a certain share of this property to their soldiers.'⁶⁸ Polier also states that the contributions collected in expeditions were duly accounted for to the central council of the Khalsa and were distributed equitably.⁶⁹ Prinsep and Scott even go further in stating that the land acquired by the Khalsa was regarded as its common property.⁷⁰ This evidence suggests that, to begin with, the Khalsa started with the idea of nationalizing property in some form or the other and holding it as a common trust.

The utmost, the French Revolution could achieve was a Bourgeois Republic. The political power under the Khalsa passed into the hands of, what the bourgeois mentality of the historians of that time had described as 'asses', qaum-i-arazil (the downtrodden), 'the lowest of the low-bred' and 'the meanest of the mean people'. Coming as it does from critical sources, there cannot be a greater testimony about the plebian character of the Sikh Revolution. And it was not an accident of history. Guru Nanak had identified himself about 250 years earlier with such 'lowest of the low', and Guru Hargobind⁷¹ and Guru Gobind Singh⁷² had blessed these very people with sovereignty. The Sikh Revolution was, thus, not only an egalitarian social revolution it was also a plebian political revolution.

CHAPTER XIX

CHARACTERIZATION

1. The Dynamics of Revolutionary Movements

The dynamics of change (motion) are different from the laws of inertia. This is particularly true of revolutions which lead to major upheavals. A great distinguishing feature of the revolutionary movements is their emotive upsurge which is surcharged more by ideological inspiration than by mundane considerations.

Commenting on the French Revolution, Tocqueville writes: 'I have often asked myself what is the source of that passion for political liberty, which in every age has caused man to achieve the greatest results ever accomplished by man; I no longer think that the true love of liberty is even ever born from the mere view of the material comforts that it secures. That which in all ages has so strongly attached to it the hearts of certain men is its own attractions, its own charm, quite apart from any material advantage; it is the joy of being able to speak, to act, to breathe, without restraint under no sovereign but God and the law. He who desires in liberty anything other than itself is born to be a servant.'¹

Lefebvre and Rude express more or less, the same viewpoint. 'For the last half century students have applied themselves, and rightly so, to the task of showing how the revolutionary spirit originated in a social and economic environment. But we should commit no less an error in forgetting that there is no true revolutionary spirit without the idealism which alone inspires sacrifices²....it needed more than economic hardship, social discontent, and the frustration of political and social ambitions to make a revolution. To give cohesion of the discontents and aspirations of widely varying social classes there had to be some

unifying body of ideas, common vocabulary of hoped an protest, something, in short, like a common “revolutionary psychology.” In the revolutions of our day this ideological preparation has been the concern of political parties but there were no such parties in the eighteenth century France. In this case, the ground was prepared, in the first place, by the writers of the Enlightenment..³

If this be true of the French Revolution, the role of Sikh ideology in the genesis and development of the Sikh Revolution assumes even greater significance. The need to provide ‘cohesion’ and a common ‘revolutionary psychology’ to the mutually hostile caste elements was far greater and indispensable that it was in the class society of France. Without indulging here in abstract issues, we only wish to emphasis that the primary role and importance of the ideological and emotional content of revolutionary movements are well recognized.

(2) Revolutionary and Post-revolutionary Phases

Ideological upsurges, wherein the participants, for the time being atleast, rise above ordinary human and environmental limitations, wherein groups and classes forget their parochial narrow interests, loyalties or antipathies and make common cause for a higher objective, are a phenomenon distinct from the placid course of human history. As such, the study of the revolutionary phase of a movement should not be lumped together with that of its post-revolutionary phase in a manner so as to undermine the distinctiveness of the former. Secondly, the two phases cannot be measured by the same yardstick; To evaluate the revolutionary aspect of a movement in the light of its post-revolutionary developments would be no more valid than it would be to ascribe the rise of waves in the ocean to the very gravitational pull of the earth which brings them back to their original. Thirdly, the history of the revolutionary phase of movements should not be regarded as inconsequential, simply because revolutions, in the course of time, fall from the high ideological pitch to which they raise the people. Besides inching humanity forward towards its ultimate goal of freedom and equality, the revolutionary movements provide a perpetual source of inspiration for future efforts. This is more true of

the Sikh movement, because its study shows that the Indian mind is not inherently or irrevocably committed to social reaction.

It may be pointed out here that the Sikh Revolution showed greater tenacity in retaining the social equality and political freedom it had won. The Estates-General assembled on May 5, 1789, a military dictatorship under the guise of the Directory was inaugurated on Oct. 5, 1795, and Bonaparte delivered his Coup d' etat on Nov. 9-10, 1799. Gibbon writes : 'At the end of the first century of the Hijra, the Caliphs were the most potent an absolute monarchs of the globe. Their prerogatives were not prescribed, either in right or in fact, by the power of the nobles, the freedom of the commons, the privileges of the Church, the votes of the senate, or the memory of a free constitution. The authority of the Companions of Mohammed expired with their lives and the chiefs of the Arabian tribes left behind in the desert their spirit of equality and independence.⁴ It took over 100 years for Ranjit Singh to emerge; and even under him and the Misal Chiefs 'the free followers of Gobind could not be the observant slaves of an equal member of the Khalsa..⁵ If the revolutionary achievements of the French and Islamic Revolutions cannot be ignored because of their later developments, there is no reason why it should be done in the case of the Sikh Revolution.

3. Overall view

One is amused to read the fable in which blind men try to make out the shape of the elephant by feeling the different parts of the animal separately. The same mistake is made by the historians who characterize the Sikh movement by emphasizing some of its aspects while ignoring others equally important. Any interpretation of the Sikh movement must attempt to find a satisfactory explanation to one and all of its prominent features. Besides, they fail to differentiate between the revolutionary and the post-revolutionary phases of the movement and try to judge the former in the light of the latter.

We have been concerned only with the revolutionary phase of the Sikh movement. It was, as we have tried to show, an organic growth. Any characterization of the revolutionary Sikh movement must attempt

to interpret one and all of its important features.

Nam Dev, Kabir, Basawa, Chaitanaya and other savants repudiated, in varying accent, the caste ideology, but in no case these protests resulted in a movement aiming to cut itself completely from the caste society. The most radical departure was the one introduced by Basawa. But, his followers, the Lingayats, as already seen, got frightened, as if it were, by this very radicalism and did not pursue it to its logical conclusion. They did not want or dared not, to cut framework of the caste order.⁶ Consequently, Basawa's experiment got arrested. It remained more of an accident rather than as a purposeful anti-caste movement. In fact, there was little room for any anti-caste innovation to make much headway, or even retain its anti-caste character, unless it was organized into a movement and consistently pursued with the set aim of breaking away from the caste society. It is the Sikh movement along which, in the medieval times, consistently planned and worked to establish the Sikh Panth outside the caste society and tried to maintain its separate identity even after the time of the Gurus.

Secondly, there is not one Indian religious movement, other than the Sikh movement, which attempted to face the political problems of the age.

Thirdly, there is no other movement of Indian origin which even conceived that the downtrodden people should be the masters of their own political destiny.

Fourthly, the Sikh movement made the maintenance of ethical standards and conduct, as integral parts of its militant programme. In fact, the movement was militarized in order to achieve the highly ethical ideals of complete human freedom and equality. In the words of Chaupa Singh, Guru Gobind Singh said : "If the Sikh spirit is retained during raj (political sway) it would be a blessing; otherwise it would be a bane. It is difficult to keep alive the Sikh spirit along with raj. The sense of discrimination is lost.^{6a} This marriage between morality and militancy was not a mere theoretical exercise or a nominal ideal. The testimony of Qazi Nur-ud-Din leaves no doubt that the Sikh

revolutionary maintained the highest standards of moral conduct.⁷ The author of *Fatuhat Nama-i-Samadi*, who otherwise calls the Khalsa wicked, haughty and ungrateful, nonetheless their mother.^{7a} Forster states that the Khalsa derived its strength from the 'Forbearance of sensual pleasures.'⁸ 'There are few stories in Sikh history of outrage to women and torture to men such as stain the pages of south Indian history'^{8a} As most of these revolutionaries were drawn from those segments of the population which are known to be lax in those very qualities^{8b} the Qazi and others praised the Sikhs, the credit for raising them to lofty ethical levels cannot be traced to any source other than the ideology of the movement itself. And, it is a feature which cannot be set aside of bypassed.

Fifthly, the manner in which the downtrodden people were trained to assume the leadership of their own revolutionary movement, and not to depend on privileged leadership, is a unique historical phenomenon in Indian history.

Last, but not the least, the revolutionary spirit, the tenacity of purpose, the spirit of self-sacrifice and comradeship generated among the revolutionaries, drawn from castes which had been opposed to each other and which had been denied by the caste ideology, the use of arms for centuries on end, could not be a chance occurrence. Abdali must have been baffled when the Sikhs rebuked his wakil who brought to them (Sikhs) his offer of a compromised peace.⁹ What puzzled no less a person than Abadli, the best general of the world at that time, is a knotty problem which needs to be explained.

All those interpretations of the Sikh movement which do not cover all these issues and fail to take an overall view are inadequate. For example, the military struggle of the movement for religious and political freedom and for a plebian mission is a major fact of Sikh history which cannot be ignored. Some historians have tried to explain it on the assumption that the militarization of the movement was due to the influx into it of a large number of Jat elements. Besides being factually incorrect, it is a very lopsided approach (for a detailed treatment of this topic see appendix A). Mere presence and the prowess of the Jats does not explain the ideological and the ethical content of

the movement. The Rajputs and other militants segments of the population, including Jats of other regions, were no less martial than the Jats of the central Punjab. Then, why the Sikh movement alone in India took the revolutionary direction and the ideological line it did? The Jats are well known for their internecine and inter-clanish quarells,¹⁰ and have rarely shown, on their own, any proclivity for idealistic or deeply religious pursuits.¹¹ What had inspired them to combine to fight and suffer relentless persecution for a noble cause? What made the Khattris accept the leadership of the Jat Masands, and the Jats the leaderships of carpenters and Kalals? Prior to joining the Sikh movement, the Jats of the central Punjab, like their brethren elsewhere, had never fraternized with village menials and the out-caste Chuhras. And they reverted, more or less, to the same position when their revolutionary zeal was over. What made them fraternize with the village menials and Rangretas in the Khalsa Dal?

2. Only one Interpretation

There is only one interpretation which explains satisfactorily all the important features of the Sikh movement. It is the Sikh Guru who initiated the movement, determined its ideology and goals, carefully organized and nursed it for a long period of about two hundred years (i.e. starting from the missionary tours of Guru Nana to the death of the last Guru), prevented deviations from its ideological line, gave a continuity to the movement, and finally set it on a course so that it should, in their absence from the scene, follow their guidelines on its own. All evidence leads to this conclusion. There is no other interpretation which explains all the main features of the movement in a better way.

It would be repetitive to go over all these points. We need refer briefly only to a few of them.

3. Initiative

Max Weber writes: "Rebellions by lower castes undoubtedly occurred. The question is : Why were there not more of them, and, more important, why did the great, historically significant, religious revolutions against the Hindu order stem from altogether different, relatively privileged strata and retain their roots in these?"¹² A few stray instances of unorganized sporadic

revolts by lower castes in a vast country like India, and over a long period of history, are not unlikely. But, there is a difference between sporadic revolts and a revolution. The question is whether there was any consciously organized protest, movement or revolt against the straight jacket of the caste system led by the castes adversely affected by it? Compared to slave insurrections in other lands, there is not much evidence of a Sudra uprising, initiated and led by them and having the collective interests of that caste as its aim. None of the followers of the medieval schools of Bhakti attempted to found a society outside the caste order. This is very significant. Whatever the reasons, the caste ideology had thrown such a spell on its victims, and the unfortunate Sudras were bound, hand and foot, to such an extent, that they never tried to shake off their shackles in any organized manner. Thus, all liberal social movements started at the top and came downwards to the masses, and not vice-versa. With this background, one way justifiably presume that the Sikh movement could not be an exception to the rule. Any hypothesis to the contrary will have to be established and not assumed.

There is another circumstances that favours the above conclusion. Not only did the ideological movements usually start with the upper strata of society, these also took a longer time to infiltrate into the masses. It is recognized that the idealistic content of the French Revolution was prepared by the ideals of the political writers of the Enlightenment which were widely disseminated because of the printing machine. Rosseau's Social Contract appeared in thirteen French-language editions in 1762-3.¹³ But it was the elite and the middle classes who were the first to be influenced by these ideas, —because they were more literate than the commoners. In India, there was no press in the medieval times and there was no organized party, the like of ones in modern times, which undertook to educate the masses on radical ideological lines. This may be one reason why the enlightened classes. We find that in the list of prominent Sikhs mentioned by Bhai Gurdas, the number of Sikhs from commercial castes exceeds the one from other castes. Out of the commoners, the peasantry left to itself was, somehow, more immune from ideological influences. It is the castes lower than the peasant

who became the followers of the Radical Bhaktas in larger number than the peasants.

The episode of Satnami revolt is very illustrative. Besides the Sikh movement, it was the only armed uprising of the peasants and the lower castes who had been indoctrinated by the Bhakti ideology of human freedom and equality. The outbreak started with a hot dispute between a Satnami cultivator and a foot-soldier and soon took the form of a war of liberation. The rebels fought desperately with the Imperial forces sent against them but were overpowered. The points to be noted are that nothing was heard of the Satnami resistance either before this uprising or after it. The Bhakti ideology had awakened a spirit of equality and freedom among the plebian Satnamies, but this had not been organized into a militant movement. There is no evidence to suggest that the Satnamis, before this outbreak, had ever conceived of challenging the Mughal authority. The result was that, without a determined leadership that would set goals, make a plan and preparations, and create a military organisation, the newly aroused spirit of the Satnamis found expression and ended just in an ephemeral flare-up. Without a guiding spirit, the Satnamis could not give a permanent revolutionary shape to their fervour. The conclusion is plain that without the initiative, ideology, leadership and guidance of the Sikh Gurus, the Sikh movement would have fared no better than the Satnami wave.

It was in 1633 A.D. that Guru Hargobind declared that he would wrest sovereignty from the Mughal and 'bestow this all on the downtrodden and the helpless.'¹⁴ Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa in 1699 in order to capture political power for a plebian mission. This egalitarian political aim could not be born out of the hierarchical caste society, or out of the Indian Muslim polity, which had politically dominated the non-Muslims and had come to regard a Muslim Emperor as 'Zillullah', the shadow of the Divine Being.¹⁵ The Indian masses had been mentally immobilized by the caste ideology to such an extent that they had ceased even to entertain such ideas. Nor was such a radical programme on the political horizon or agenda elsewhere at that period in the world; because the American Revolution was essentially a war of independence, and the French Revolution started

in 1789. Obviously, such a radical objective, which the Gurus set before the Sikh movement, could not but be the Gurus' own, impelled as they were by their inner urge.

4. Ideology

Originally, the initiative was all along that of the Gurus, Later, it was their ideology which determined the goals, the direction and the character of the Sikh movement. Certitude of faith is a characteristic expression of the mystic experience. The Sikh Gurus were deeply convinced that to bring about total human freedom and equality was God's own Mission and that they were the instruments for that purpose. "I express that ideology, O Lalo, as the Lord's words come to me."¹⁶ "As God spoke to me I speak, On this account I have come into the world, . . . seize and destroy the evil and the sinful."¹⁷

The disciplines of history and sociology might be precluded from talking cognizance of the mystic experience, but these cannot escape taking into account the ideology and the convictions that inspired the pioneers, who were not only the initiators and leaders of the movement but were its actual planners and directors. It was the deep conviction of the Gurus that their ideology was the right one as it was dictated by God Himself. This lent firmness to their resolve to shape and give direction to the movement the way they did it. It was also their faith that all of them were pursuing the same mission. This lent firmness, conviction and continuity to the movement.

It would be wrong to read Indian history of the medieval era in the light of the developments in Europe, especially of the French Revolution, in the corresponding period. There the writings of Enlightenment had rudely shaken old faiths and beliefs, and the ideas of freedom, equality and class interests had come to the fore. Above all, there was no caste in Europe. In India, the caste excluded the development of any movement based on values of human freedom and equality, and also of a movement requiring the cohesion of different castes, even for common class interests. If utter humiliation imposed by religious persecution and foreign domination could not bring the Hindus to react together, what else could? Leaving aside the attempts

to gain or retain feudal power, and the stray reactions of individuals or groups, the stark reality of Indian history is that, once the Mughal power was established, the only organized movements directed against Mughal religious persecution and political domination as such, were those of the Marathas and the Sikhs. Even the Maratha movement, though it had an undertone of Hindu national sentiment, was based primarily on regional Maharashtrian nationalism. Shivaji was prepared to come to terms with the Mughal rulers provided his Maratha domain was not challenged. Moreover, the rise of the Marathas under Shivaji was a middle class movement (i.e. it was led by them and the political power was captured by the Prabhus and the Brahmins), and it was favoured by historical and geographical conditions which could not be reproduced elsewhere. On the other hand, what distinguishes the Sikh movement particularly is its pronounced plebian character, and it had to struggle against more adverse circumstances, being located in the heart of the Mughal empire. The Sikh movement was also not a Hindu sectarian movement; and there is no basis to suggest that the Sikh movement was built upon, or catered to, the Punjabi regional sentiment. The Sikh ideology was universal and not sectarian or regional. Of the five Beloved Ones (Panj Pyaras), four belonged to places outside the Punjab. More than half of the population of the Punjab embraced Islam and was moved by its religious loyalties to support Muslim rule. Also, there is not a single instance when the people of the Punjab made a common cause as Punjabies. Therefore, it would be a travesty of facts to trace the genesis of an exceptional movement solely to such cause (e.g. the religious persecution by the Mughal government and the economic distress of the people), which were operative throughout the country, without taking into account the one special factor that made all the difference. This was the Sikh ideology and the tenacity with which it was pursued. The Sikh movement was the product of the impact of this ideology on the environmental conditions. The followers of the Gurus were also initially drawn to them purely from religious motives. It is due to the deep commitment of the Gurus to the revolutionary cause that they channelized the religious faith in them of their followers into a course which aimed at achieving political

freedom and capturing political power for plebian objectives.

The Sikh ideology not only inspired the movement; it was the mainstay of its revolutionary phase. It is this ideology which attracted and held together, for a higher purpose, elements drawn from mutually hostile castes. It is the inspiration of the Sikh ideology which distinguishes those guerillas, who carried on a relentless warfare to the point of being virtually exterminated a number of times, from those Jat and other elements, who joined the movement when it seemed to succeed and left the moment it had hard times. Bhangu makes a clear distinction between such Jats and the Khalsa. Latif writes: it is acknowledge on all hands that the conversion of bands of undisciplined Jats (given to rapine and plunder or to agricultural pursuits) into a body of conquerors and a political corporation, was due entirely to the genius of Govind, whose history is closely interwoven with that of the Sikhs as a nation. It was because of its deep commitment to plebian political objectives that the movement pursued the armed struggle to its bitter end until its aims were achieved. This was why the movement, though hard pressed, rejected a number of offers of compromised peace by Abadai; who could not comprehend that in this case he was not pitted against feudal lords who could either be crushed militarily or be brought to terms. Here, he was face to face with an ideologically surcharged mass movement committed to achieve its own plebian objectives; in which there was no room for compromise with feudalism or autocracy and whose ranks were being replenished from its inexhaustible mass base. And, as and when the ideological hold weakened, the movement started disintegrating. Even during the post-revolutionary period itself, it was the Akalis, who represented the Sikh ideals, who provided some sort of a cementing force among the warring Missal chiefs. The military successes of Ranjit Singh elated the Sikh for a time and generated some sense of nationality among them. But, when they suffered defeat at the hands of the British, the Khalsa, who had waged relentless guerilla warfare against the Mughals, found it difficult even to retain the consciousness of their identity. It was because the Sikhs had cut themselves adrift from their true ideological moorings, and what substituted these, the

Khalsa nationalism, was too newly-born and short-lived to sustain them.

7. Propulsive Force

There is an innate spark in human nature which yearns for freedom and equality, and it works wonders when it is ignited and properly organized. The Gurus ignited this spark. In Cunningham's words : 'The last apostle of the Sikhs did not live to see his own ends accomplished, but he effectually roused the dormant energies of vanquished people and filled them with a lofty although fitful longing for social freedom and national ascendancy, the proper adjuncts of that purity of worship which had been preached by Nanak. Gobind saw that was yet vital, and relumed it with Promethean fire.'¹⁸

The Sikh movement derived its strength also because its aims corresponded to the aspirations of the masses. The ideology of the movement had greater appeal for the common peasants and the lower castes who were increasingly drawn into it as the revolutionary struggle progressed. As already pointed out, the success of the Sikh movement depended upon the strength it derived from the masses. Abadli's greatest lieutenant, Najib-ud-daulah, 'openly admitted himself beaten at the hands of an entire nation at arms and in jubilant spirits and nascent energy, "increasing like ants and locusts."¹⁹ This is how the vanguard of Sikh guerilla revolutionaries succeeded in involving the masses in their struggle. It was not a war carried on by mercenaries or feudal levies. It became a people's war. This fact alone should be enough to highlight the plebian character of the movement.

It is, however, not to be lost sight of that it is the religious faith of the Khalsa in the Gurus that sustained the movement throughout its struggle, especially during its critical periods. Tocqueville wrote : 'It is not always be going from bad to worse that a society falls into a revolution. It happens most often that a people, which has supported without complain, as if they were not felt, the most oppressive laws, violently throws them off as soon s their weight is lightened... Feudalism at the height of it power had not inspired Frenchmen with so much hatred as it did on the eve of its disappearing.'²⁰ Elaborating this point Rude writes: 'Tocqueville's comments are illuminating because they

remind us that revolutions—as opposed to peasant rebellions or food riots—seldom if ever, take the form of mere spontaneous outbursts against tyranny, oppression or utter destitution; both the experience and the hope of something better are important factors in the story.²¹ The Sikh Revolution was not inspired by any hope of reform or concession held by the Mughal government. It was sustained by the hope that the Guru's word that the Khalsa must triumph in the end would come true.²²

The Sikh ideology sparked the innate human longing for freedom and equality. The masses were further aroused because they saw in the Sikh ideology the fulfilment of their hopes and aspirations. The content of 'liberty and equality' was not left vague, as it was in the French Revolution; it was well defined from the plebian point of view. It was the first time in Indian history that the down-trodden were given the call to capture the political power in their own hands. The faith in the Sikh religion and in the Gurus provided both the inspiration and the steel frame-work. Genuinely held religious convictions sink deep into the human mind. These factors resulted in a formidable combination. It propelled the movement to continue the armed struggle against such heavy odds that no human calculations could normally hold out even a ray of hope for its success.

Such were the *raison d'etre* and the elan of the Sikh Revolution.

Appendix A

Misinterpretations

The militarization of the Sikh movement is an historical fact which cannot be ignored and has got to be explained. Failing to understand that the militarization of the Sikh movement was an organic growth of the Sikh thesis, some historians have invented hypotheses, although it involves some repetition, is necessary; because the process of elimination shows that the militarization of the movement was a logical development of the Sikh view of religion.

Some writers believe that the militarization of the Sikh movement by Guru Hargobind was a departure from the teachings of Guru Nanak and his four immediate successors. This misunderstanding arises out of two premises. One, that the first five Gurus were opposed to the use of force even for a just cause, and second, that the Sikh religion is not concerned with the solution of social and political problems thrown up by life. We have already dealt with both of these issues.

Another view, mentioned casually by a few writers, is that Guru Hargobind militarized the Sikhs for the personal consideration of taking revenge for his father's death. This view, in a way, begs the question. It ignores or misses the fact that Guru Arjan deliberately chose the path of martyrdom. He warned his Sikhs not to pay the fine on his behalf, and told saint Mian Mir that he was suffering the torture to set an example so that religion could be defended by the 'open profession thereof'. If he did not do it, 'God would deem him to be the enemy of

religion.' The Guru wanted to rouse the spirit of the faint-hearted people for the purpose of defending their religion. His sacrifice was a part of the build-up of the revolutionary struggle to follow. If the logic of this misinterpretation is followed, no revolutionary movement can escape being dubbed as a series of revenges and counter-revenges. A revolutionary movement can size up to its name only if it follows a course which invites persecutions by the established order it, wants to change. And, if there are no reactions on the part of the revolutionaries to those persecutions, the revolution remains still-born. Mass movements are not born out of the personal reactions of a few individuals or groups, unless these are integrated with the aspirations and emotions of the people at large. In common life, so except their kith and kin are deeply affected. But, when Bhagat Singh and Dutt were hanged, the whole of India was shaken to its depths, because they laid down their lives for the cause of the country.

There are two other considerations which go against the conjecture that the militarization of the movement was undertaken for any personal reasons. Originally, there was some opposition to militarization in the Sikh ranks, but it was clearly on the mistaken belief that the step was against the tenets of the earlier Gurus. This shows that the Sikhs, who were drawn towards the Guru by ideological considerations, judged the Guru's activities also by those standards. The argument which Bhai Gurdas uses in order to dispel their doubts is that the known in due course, i.e. the Guru was militarization the Sikhs for the sake of the mission alone. It is an appeal in the name of ideals. Secondly, Guru Arjan died in June 1606 and the first Sikh battle Guru Hargobind fought against the Mughals was in 1633. Also, this battle was fought in Shah Jahan's reign and not in the reign of Jahangir, who was responsible for Guru Arjan's martyrdom. Indubhusan writes that 'the policy that the Guru (Guru Hargobind) had been pursuing was bound, sooner or later, to bring him into collision with the Government and it speaks a good deal of his ability and political skill that he succeeded in avoiding the conflict so long.'² This strategy suggest long-range

planning for long-range objectives, and not impulsive shortcut decisions or solutions. Another very important indication of this is that, after long years of waiting, when the Guru thought the moment opportune, it was he who took the initiative in coming to grips with the Mughal authorities. The first battle of Jallo was fought over a hawk of Shah Jahan, which the Sikhs had captured and the Guru refused to surrender it. Shah Jahan could not tolerate such an effrontery. He called it an act of rebellion. An army was sent against the audacious rebel, but it was routed with heavy loss at Sangrana near Amritsar. Other battles followed as a sequence.

Another misinterpretation, which has been made a major plank by those who would trace the genesis and growth of the movement to environment factors alone, is that the militarization of the Sikh movement was due to the large influx of Jats among the Sikh ranks.

The Jats and Sikh militarization

It has been stated that ‘the arming of the Panth could not have been the result of any decision by Guru Hargobind’, and that, ‘the growth in militancy within the Panth must be traced primarily to the impact of Jat cultural patterns and to economic problems which prompted a militant response. This proposition raises three issues—the question of leadership, the impact of Jat cultural patterns and economic problems.

1. The Question of Leadership

On this issue, it has to be seen whether effective leadership lay with the followers of the Gurus or the Gurus themselves.

There is not a shred of evidence to suggest that any of the succeeding Gurus was nominated in consultation with, or at the suggestion of, the Sangat (the Sikh following). The choice of the successor was always a personal decision of the nominating Guru. The faithful were expected to accept the nomination without any reservation. Even when the nomination of the ninth Guru was vaguely indicated by the word ‘Baba Bakale’,⁴ the devout Sikhs diverted all their attention to finding out the intended Baba at Bakala. It was the founder Guru, Guru Nanak himself, who had arrived at the decision that, in order to carry

forward his aims and ideals, he must have a successor. Evidently, the choice of the successor was the most important decision of the Gurus, who, whenever necessary, applied extremely rigorous tests before making the final selection. Those, who, for whatever reason, did not accept the nomination, had either to opt out of the main current or were discarded, as it happened in the case of the Minas, the Dhirmalias and the Ramrayyas, No deviation from the avowed ideology was ever tolerated. Baba Atal, a son of the sixth Guru, is said to have shown a miracle. It being against the Sikh ideology, the Baba was given such a stern reprimand by the Guru for his lapse that he had to give up his mortal coil. Ram Rai, who misquoted the Guru Grant in order to please Emperor Aurangzeb at Delhi, was completely disowned by his father, the seventh Guru. It would, therefore, be too simple to suggest that the fifth Guru, who laid down his life for the sake of the faith and its ideology but did not agree to change an iota of the Sikh scriptures, would choose a person who would follow an ideological line different from his; or that the sixth Guru, who had made his own son lose his life for an ideological error, would himself allow any distortion of the ideology so as to accommodate his Jat followers.

The entire Sikh history is a refutation of the assumption that the Gurus, even though not elected or selected by the Sikhs, were mere figure-heads, had no clear-cut objectives and plans for the community of which they were the accredited and unchallenged leaders, and were stampeded into unauthorised action by the will, predilections or the mood of their followers. A glance at the landmarks of the Sikh history will further clarify this point.

The turning points in Sikh history during the Guru period were : (i) the break with the Indian ascetic tradition, (ii) the building of a society not based on the caste structure, and (iii) the militarization of the Panth. All these changes were so radically opposed to the Indian religious tradition that it would be idle to suggest that a mere chance combination of ideologically indifferent elements and circumstances placed in juxtaposition could have achieved them. Only a purposeful and determined leadership could have brought about the said departures.

The decision to eschew asceticism was Guru Nanak's taken at a

time when there was practically no organised Sikh Sangat. Kabir also preached against asceticism. Why, then were there no marked social and political growths among Kabir-Panthlees similar to those of the Sikhs? This difference lay in the systematic work that the Sikh Gurus did for their ideals, as in instanced by the third Guru having deliberately separated the Sikhs from the passive recluses. Similar is the case regarding the caste system.

Kabir was unequivocal against the system of castes, but the Kabir-panth never developed into a social entity distinct from the caste-ridden Hindus; because he showed no purposive drive or the will to organise a separate Panth outside the caste society as Guru Nanak and his successors did. The Kabir-Panth did not have to surmount more difficult circumstances than the Sikhs in overcoming caste prejudices. It is Guru Nanak who started the institution of a common kitchen for all. But, it is only the third Guru who made it obligatory for everyone to partake food from the Langar. This calculated but cautious approach is indicative of the hesitation or opposition expected from their rank and file to the Gurus' new line of thinking. When the tenth Guru, after quite a long interval of preparation by the previous Gurus, decided to break away completely from the caste society and created the Khalsa, there were dissensions and disputes among the Sikh ranks. But, it was entirely because of the initiative, guiding influence and drive of the Gurus that the movement, despite all opposition, never swerved from its ideals.

The arming of the Sikh community was the third turning point in the Sikh history. It has been shown that it was the necessary sequence of Guru Arjan's decision to 'defend his faith by the open profession thereof', to raise the institution of the 'True Emperor', and to help the rebel Khusrau. And yet there is an unwarranted conjecture that what Jahangir was really concerned about was the growing Jat following of the Gurus, and that the reason given by Jahangir himself in his autobiography should be discounted.

2. The Impact of Jat Cultural Patterns

(a) *The Arming of the Panth and Jats*

It is an accepted fact that there was a rift in the Sikh ranks at the time of Guru Arjan's succession. It is nowhere known however, that those who opted out in favour of Prithi Chand excluded Jat Sikhs. Not far from Amritsar, at Jandiala, was the religious headquarter of Handalias, a schismatic sect of Sikhs, who were themselves Jat and had Jat following. But, neither Prithi Chand nor Handalias, both of whom had set up separate Guruships in opposition to the Sikh movement, ever came into conflict with the administration. On the other hand, they cooperated fully with the authorities. Prithi Chand was instrumental in the persecution of Guru Arjan, and in later history, the Handalias became active agents for the persecution of the Sikhs. If the mere intrusion of Jat elements into the Sikh ranks could arouse the fears of the authorities, it should have done so in the case of Prithi Chand and Handalias too; because there is no evidence to indicate that the Jat followers of these two sects were less armed than the Jat followers of the Gurus. What made the actual difference was that one party chose the path of challenging the political authority of the day, while the other was interested in mere ritualism, without the socio-political concerns of the original faith. That Guru Arjan made his momentous choice deliberately, and that it was his own, is established by the fact that he told Jahangir that was a worshipper of the Immortal God and recognized no monarch save Him. The Sikhs of Lahore wanted to compromise with the authorities by paying the fine on his behalf but he forbade them to do so.

If the presence of armed Jats in the Gurus' Sangat (assembly) was usual affair and aroused the suspicion of the Administration, why did Bhai Budha, himself a Jat, remonstrate with Guru Hargobind when he found him insisting on the militarization of the Sikhs? The enrolment of Jats in large numbers to the Sikh ranks is supposed to have begun in the time of Guru Arjan. He was Guru for nearly twenty five years. Why this arming of the Panth, which it has been assumed must have preceded Guru Hargobind's decision, was taken notice of by

Jahangir and his subordinates in the last nine months of the Guru's life and not earlier by Akbar or his Administration? Akbar had liberal views on religious matters, but he could not have been less alive to any potential threat to his political authority.

There is no basis for presuming that the Jats were armed but the Khatrias were not. Ibbeston writes : 'The Khatrias occupies a different position among the people of the Punjab from that of other mercantile castes. Superior to them in physique, in manliness and in energy, he is not, like them, a mere shopkeeper, but a direct representative of the Kshatriya of Manu'. It is true that the Khatrias of the present times have taken more to trade. 'They are not usually military in their character, but are quite capable of using the sword, when necessary' Nothing prevented the Khatrias from bearing arms in the earlier troubled times we are dealing with. When the Taruna Dal branch of the Khalsa Dal was reorganized into five divisions, two of these were headed by Khatrias and one by a Ranghreta.

Nor was Guru Hargobind's decision to arm the Sikhs taken casually or accidentally. In the first place, it was done under the specific instructions of Guru Arjan. Secondly, at the very time of his installation as Guru, it is he, who directed Bhai Buddha to amend the ceremony followed on such occasions and adorn him with two swords of Meere and Peere, signifying the blending of religious and temporal authority. It was not customary for the Sangat to suggest changes or innovate ceremonies, much less radical departures such as this certainly was. He followed this up by founding the 'Akaal Takht', a seat of temporal authority as distinct from the place of worship alone, and set up two flags fluttering before it, one distinctly signifying religious and the other temporal authority. Such steps amounted to the declaration of a parallel government and marked an open change in the external character of the movement. Here we have the indisputable authority of Bhai Gurdas, the Guru's contemporary, that far from persuading the Guru to take these steps, there were grumbling among the Sikhs against the line taken by the Guru. Even Bhai Buddha, chief among the Sikhs and himself a Jat, initially argued against it with the Guru. There is no mention, whatsoever, that the other Jats among the

Sikhs supported the Guru on this issue, or that Sikhs ever grouped themselves on caste lines to deliberate on any subject. The Masands, leaders of the local Sangats, approached the Guru's mother in order that she dissuade the Guru from inviting trouble from the rulers. By inference, had those among the Sikhs, who were opposed to Guru Hargobind's policy of militarization been consulted, they would not have supported Guru Arjan in bestowing his blessings on Prince Khusro, as that would have averted the Imperial wrath. As the interval between these events is not long, it is reasonable to suppose that the composition of the Sangat could have changed materially. The incident of 'the hawk' and 'the horses' also indicate that the initiative for challenging the political authority came from the Guru.

As to the creation of the Khalsa, Sainapat, a contemporary, and Koer Singh, a near contemporary, expressly state that the tenth Guru's step was opposed by many members of the higher castes. The dramatic manner, in which the nucleus of the Khalsa, the five Beloved Ones, was chosen., shows how Guru Gobind Singh had kept his counsel to himself. A surprise was sprung on the Sangat. Far influencing or pressurizing the Guru to found the Khalsa, only five among all the Sikhs came forward to offer their lives, and the total number of others who were also initiated on that day was twenty-five only. As already referred to, the creation of the Khalsa caused a serious rift among the Sikh ranks, but the Guru did not deviate from his plan. At Anandpur, on another occasion, he allowed those who wanted to discontinue the fight (Bedaviaas) to depart but stuck to his plan. Again, at a time when he had lost his army and had no visible chance of success left, and when some Sikhs suggested to the Guru at Muktsar to discontinue the struggle against the state and offered to bring a about conciliation between him and Aurangzeb, the Guru chided them for their presumptuousness in trying to advise the Guru.

These glaring facts should be enough to show that the initiative and determination for carrying on the armed struggle against the established state was invariably that of the Guru and not that of his followers. The working of a movement or a system cannot be evaluated merely by taking into account the objective or

environmental factors. The Indians for outnumbered the British in the administrative machinery of the Government of India, and even in the army the ratio of the India soldiers to the British soldiers was roughly three to one. One cannot conclude from this alone that the Indians were in effective control of the government of the country. For the purpose of any assessment, the directive purpose and the levers of power have to be correlated with the objective conditions.

(b) The Jats and Arms

It has been assumed that the Jats who used to come to Guru Arjan to pay homage must have come armed. In the first places, it was on Indian religious custom to go armed to any holy person. Rather, the general practice was, as a mark of respect, to disarm oneself beforehand. In fact, Ghulam Hussain Khan asserts that upto the time of Guru Gobind Singh 'the Sikhs wore only religious garb, without any kind of arms.' Nor is it established that the bearing of arms was Jat peculiarity. If Mughal policy was to disarm the population, it would not have left the Jats out. If not, why other elements of the population, especially Khatirs and those who later became Mazhabi Sikhs, did not also bear arms? In all probability the exploited class of peasants were, by and large, unarmed. Arrian noted that husbandmen are not furnished with arms, nor have any military duties to perform. The revenue and other demands on them were so excessive that they were compelled to sell their women, children and cattle to meet them. 'The peasants were carried off, attached to heavy iron chains, to various markets and fairs, with their poor, unhappy wives behind them, carrying their small children in their arms, all crying and lamenting their evil plight. When these peasants resisted, their uprisings misfired, because 'the purely peasant uprising of a few villages would, perhaps, have contrasted pitifully with the military efforts of even the smaller Zamindars. All this point to the probability that the common peasants were unarmed. These is, therefore, no reason to believe that the Jat who came to the Guru were differently placed. When the Sikh visitors to Guru Gobind Singh complained that they were harassed on their way by Muhammadans, the Guru advised them to

come armed. That is probably, also the reason why Guru Gobind Singh in his letters (Hukamnamas) lays special stress that his Sikhs should come armed to Anandpur. The 'Rehitnamas' also insist that the Khalsa should remain always armed.

(c) *Aims and Objectives*

There is another aspect which needs elucidation. What was the motive force, and the urge, which led to the militarization of the Sikhs?

The Sikh ideology clearly involved the finding of solutions for the multifarious socio-political problems posed by the times. It is, therefore, important to understand that in the matter of identifying motivation, the ideology of a movement would normally furnish the closest clue for investigation and verification by historical facts. In any case, there is no ground for ignoring this approach and instead putting a premium on random speculation. A good deal of misunderstanding about the Sikh history could be avoided if the prejudice against the religious duty of fighting just political battles and the use of force for a just cause are shed. The Gurus did not 'dabble in politics' casually or accidentally as some historians have put it; they regarded it as their duty to fight not only social injustice but also political oppression. Guru Arjan could have chosen to remain indifferent to political affairs. Similarly, Guru Hargobind could have avoided the setting up of a parallel political authority. Further, why did Guru Har Rai, if he was not working for a set objective, offer military help to Dara Shikoh, knowing full well the consequences that followed a similar step taken by Guru Arjan? Again, Guru Tegh Bahadur deliberately did not follow Aurangzeb's advice to disarm his followers. Instead, he embraced martyrdom to save the oppressed Kashmiri Pandits, because the resolve to resist religious persecution and combat political oppression was a part of the Guru's programme. Guru Gobind Singh leaves no doubt about his mission of life: "I took birth in order to spread faith, save the saints, and exterminate all tyrants."²⁵ That his Sikhs also understood it to be so, is shown by the contemporary Sainapat, who wrote that the purpose of creating the Khalsa was 'to destroy the evil-doer and

eliminate suffering. The near-contemporary Koer Singh also recorded that the Guru was born to destroy the Mughals. Even the later Sikh writings unanimously speak of this being an objective of the mission. Sainapat twice makes a very significant remark that, while founding the Khalsa, the Guru at last revealed what had till then been kept a secret. This indicates that the creation of the Khalsa was pre-planned objective of the mission. All these signposts that charter the course of the Sikh movement, extending over a long period, drive one to the conclusion that the Gurus were working with the set aim of combating social and political injustice and remoulding the social structure.

(d) The role of Jats

Before discussing the role of Jat, we should like to make one point clear. Leaving aside its interactions with the external factors, the Sikh movement in its internal development was essentially the product of Sikh ideology. But mass movements, especially those which set before them the objective of capturing political power, cannot afford to admit only ideologically conscious members. Such persons are always in a minority. So long as the Gurus were alive, there was no question of views and interests contrary to the Sikh doctrine coming to the surface, because the world of the Gurus was final. After them, there was an interplay of action and reaction between the ideologically conscious and less conscious elements within the Sikh movement. Like all such movements, the Sikh movement may also be roughly divided into two phases, the period of ideological ascendancy and that of its decline. In the first phase, the Khalsa period, Sikh ideology remained supreme in determining the character and the direction of the movement. In second phase, the period of Missals and Ranjit Singh, the hold of ideology on individuals and the movement, as always happens, relaxed. With the passage of time, regression in the ideological level is not peculiar to the Sikh movement. Revolutions have always been haunted by reaction. What we seek to emphasize is that it would be wrong to judge the history of the Khalsa phase of the Sikh movement in the light of later developments. That would be putting the cart before the horse. During the period of

the Gurus, and for most part of the eighteenth century, it was the Sikh ideology that influenced the Jats and other elements who joined the movement. It was not the Jats' character which distorted the movement during its revolutionary phase, as it happened later.

Besides, there is no data to infer that Jats were the prominent element among the Sikhs when Guru Hargobind decided to militarize the movement, or that the Jats used to come armed when they came to pay homage to the Gurus.

It has been assumed that the Jats must have joined in large numbers because Guru Arjan established some religious centres in the rural areas of Majha. The Jats are well known for their indifference towards deep religious affairs. The short interval of time between the opening of these centres and the time when the influx of Jats into the Sikh ranks is supposed to have aroused Jahangir's misgivings is not such as to favour the theory of largescale enrolment of the Jats in Sikhism. Bhai Gurdas has given the names of about 200 prominent Sikhs of Guru Arjan. Of these ten were Brahmins, eight Jats (including two whose caste is given as Jatu, which is Rajput sub-caste), three fishermen, three calcio-printers, two Chandals, two brick-layers, two Bhatts, one potter, one goldsmith and one Mohamman. The rest either belonged to Khatri and other castes connected with commerce, etc., or did not have their castes specified.

The above figures indicate clearly the caste-wise composition of Guru Arjan's important Sikhs. The constitution of the general Sangat is not likely to have been materially different. The number of Khartis and castes connected with commerce, professions, etc., is many times more than the combined number of Jats and lower castes. Among the latter category, the low castes out-number the Jats. The conjecture about Jats having joined Guru Arjan in large numbers is contradicted even by Mohsin Fani, who says; 'Some Sikhs of the Guru do agricultural work and some trade, and a multitude takes up service. These figures, thus knock out the bottom of the assumption that the setting up of rural centres increased the proportion of Jats among the Guru's followers to such an extent as to cause apprehensions in Jahangir's mind. Besides, as already stated, it would be going beyond the limits of historical propriety to reject

the autobiographical testimony of Jahangir about his motives for ordering Guru Arjan's execution and instead to impute a conjectural motive to the emperor for his action.

Bhai Gurudas's testimony about the reaction of the Sikhs against the Guru's steps for militarization has already been indicated. He does not mention many Jats in his enumeration of important Sikhs of Guru Hargobind. True, Mohsin Fani says that many Jats joined as the Guru's followers. This author was twenty years younger than Guru Hargobind, who was eleven years old when he became the Guru, took the decision to arm the Sikhs, built the Akal Takhat and started the construction of Lohgarh fort. In view of his earlier observation about the Jats being in a minority in the time of Guru Arjan, Mohsin Fani's statement that the Jats joined as the followers of Guru Hargobind refers evidently to a period subsequent to the latter's decision to militarize the Sikhs. This would correspond to the evidence noted by Macauliffe that, on learning of the military preparation initiated by Guru Hargobind, five hundred warriors from Majha, Doaba and Malwa regions volunteered their services to the Guru. Moreover, Mohsin Fani's evidence has no weight compared to the authentic, reliable and contemporary evidence of Bhai Gurdas. In fact, the adversaries of Guru Hargobind derisively called his forces weak because they were composed of barbers, washermen, cobblers, and the like. In any case, how could a minority group make its impact felt to such an extent as to change overnight the very direction of the movement? It has already been made clear that the vital decisions were always made by the Guru themselves. The Sangat never forced the Gurus to action. But, supposing, for argument's sake, that Guru Hargobind wanted to take into account the views of the Sangat in making his momentous decision that opinion could naturally have been of the leading Sikhs, of whom Jats, according to Bhai Gurdas, formed a negligible minority. And it would be logical to suggest that these few Jats, even if they had views different from those of others and the Guru, could impose their will on the rest on such a crucial and ideological issue. Actually, the Guru, according to Bhai Gurdas, stuck to this decision, despite the opposition from Bab Buddha, his mother, the Masands and some others.

From the time of Guru Har Rai to that of Guru Gobind Singh, there was no overt military activity except that of maintaining some armed men. Before founding the Khala, Bhikhan Khan, an opponent of the tenth Guru, spoke contemptuously of his forces being composed of low-caste men. Almost all the participants whose names are recorded in connection with the battle of Bhangani, were non-Jats. The first three well-known martyrs from amongst the Sikhs, during Guru Tegh Bahadur's time, were Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das and Bhai Dyala, all non-Jats. Out of the five Beloved Ones (the Five Pyaras), only one was a Jat, and he too belonged to Hastinapur, outside the Punjab. According to Koer Singh, Guru Gobind Singh said: "Vaisayas, Sudras and Jats I have incorporated in the Panth." Of the twentyfive Muktas mentioned by Koer Singh, three were Bhatias, five Khattris, four Aroras, three Lubanas, and two water-carriers. The caste of the rest are not given. The forty men at Chamkaur included five Bhatias, four Aroras, some Khattris and Kalals (distillers), two Rengretas (sweeper caste), two Brahimins, Sanga Singh of the trans-Indus areas, sons of the Guru and the Guru himself. Those who took part in Banda's Irvine writes: "The scavengers and leather-dressers and such like persons who were very numerous among the Sikhs, committed excesses of every description.

In the face of all this it would be unjustified to assert that the growth of militancy within the Panth resulted from the impact of the so-called Jat cultural patterns. Besides, it becomes very difficult to understand how these so-called Jat patterns were so powerful as to submerge all ideological considerations of the large majority of the influential participants in the Sangat. Whether or not the original Jat patterns of culture, or Jat traits, corresponded to the characteristic features of the Sikh movement will be seen hereafter.

(e) *The five K's*

Another hypothesis advanced is that the Khalsa accepted the five symbols (the five K's) under the influence of Jat cultural patterns. Unless the Jat cultural patterns are identified and correlated with the

five K's or other characteristic of the movement, this view remains conjectural. For, there is no evidence to suggest that the K's were distinct and characteristic Jat features. MczGregor writes of the people of the Punjab, who opposed Alexander when he crossed the Ravi : "Some had darts, others spears and axes. No mention is made of bows and arrows, so generally employed by the Sikhs of the present day, as weapons of war. No mention is made of the weapons used by the Jats in their encounters with Mahmood Ghaznavi, Timur and Babar. If the Kirpan (the sword) was ever used as a weapon by the Jats, Manu had specified it as Kshatriya's weapon much earlier, and its used in Indian history was more conspicuously associated with the Rajputs. Then why trace the adoption by the Khalsa of this 'K' (Kirpan) to the Jat cultural patterns?

Another important 'K' is the Keshas (hair). Alberuni noted that the Hindus 'do not cut any hair of the body'. This shows that the keeping of hair was, if it was, not a Jat peculiarity. Anyhow, the point is not about keeping the hair as such, but about the sanctity that came to be attached to them; so that the Singhs would give up their lives rather than allow these to removed. Rose writes : 'The only distinctive Jat cults are tribal.... Among the Hindu and Sikhs Jats, especially of the north central and central Districts, a form of ancestor-worship, called Jathera, is common. Sikhism transcends tribal consciousness, is opposed to all forms of ancestor-worship, and the position of the non-Jats was not so subservient in the Panth as to enable the Jats to impose their cultural patterns, if any, on the Panth against Sikh tenets. In any case, this Jathera-worship can in not way be linked with the sanctity attached to keeping of hair by the Singhs. Had there been any substance in this conjectural hypothesis, how would one explain the total disappearance of these cultural symbols from amongst the non-Sikh Jats of the Punjab and the neighbouring states? How, during the days of the general persecution of the Singhs, only the Khalsa of genuine faith retained their hair at the cost of their lives, while others, who joined them for temporary gains, had no compunction to remove these in order to save their skins? How, in the modern times, the Jats among the Sikhs, comparatively speaking, have become tax and the non-Jats Sikhs grown strict⁴² in their adherence o the these

symbols? Further, whether the five 'K's were borrowed by the Panth from the Jats or not is not the relevant point; because symbols by themselves do not lead to anything, much less to militancy. Revolutionary movements are not made by the symbols; it is such movements that give meaningful significance to them.

Unfortunately, the above hypothesis completely misses the significance of the prescription of the five 'K's. The Guru's step was clearly aimed not only at carving out a new community, distinct from the others, with its own cultural pattern, socio-religious ideology, and approach to life, but also at cutting away the members of this community from their previous moorings and affinities so as to avoid reversionary trends. That is why, at the time of the baptism ceremony, one of the injunctions was that: 'hereby are destroyed all your connections with previous religious systems, customs, rituals, occupational stigmas. Etc., etc. There is a clear record of the Guru's determination to create a new and distinguishable people. On being told that few Sikhs appeared to have stood by Guru Tegh Bahadur at the time of his martyrdom because there was no distinguishing mark on a Sikh, the Guru is reported to have said: 'I will assign such distinguishing marks to the Sikhs that a Sikh present even among thousands will not be able to conceal himself.

Undoubtedly, the contribution of the Jats, with their fighting qualities, to the Sikh struggle is very valuable, but, as already seen, the contribution of the castes lower than the Jats has been very significant during the Khalsa or the revolutionary phase of the movement. If the inspiration of the Sikh ideology could turn these people, who had been rendered spineless by movement needed no goading from the Jats for its militarization. Also, if the bearing of arms and martial qualities are the only requirements for shaping a revolutionary movement, why could not the Jats produce one elsewhere?

(f) Other Jat Traits

There are a few other traits of Jats which are relevant to the interpretation of the Sikh movement, and, therefore, need to be taken notice of. For instance :

- (i) Eric R. Wolf, who has made a case study of peasant wars of the twentieth century in six countries, gives a number of reasons why: 'The peasant is especially handicapped in passing from passive recognition of wrongs to political participation as a means of setting them right. He further adds: 'Marxists have long argued that peasants without outside leadership cannot make a revolution: and our case material would bear them out.' The Jats in India were no more radical. In their history, their unity of purpose and loyalty never rose higher than the tribal or clannish level, and they showed a singular lack of political consciousness. A deputation of Jats and Meds is said to have waited on King Dajusha and begged him to nominate a king, whom both sides would obey. Accordingly, he appointed his sister to rule over them and they willingly submitted to her. The Jats form the majority in Sindh; they are three times more than the Rajputs in the Punjab, and are approximately equal to the number of Rajputs in Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Marwar. Yet, Muhammadan historians never took much notice of them, because politically they were inconsequential. As against them, the pages of Indian history are full of Rajput exploits. It is only in the small area of Bharatpur that a Jat principality was established on the ruins of the Mughal Empire. Its founder Churaman, who used the tribal sentiments of the Jats for his own ends, was a pure opportunist and was never inspired by any high ideals. He turned, for personal reasons, against the Syed brothers, to whom he owed so much for his rise to power. How then do we explain that in the Sikh movement along the Jat, after all a class of common peasantry, developed a political consciousness that led to capturing power not for the Jats as such, but for the Khalsa, which was composed of men of all castes and suffered, without compromising their socio-political and ideological aims and ideals, one of the worst persecutions in history? How is it that not a single Missal came to be named after the names of those clannish sub-

caste (e.g. Sandhu, Sidhu, Gill, Dhillon etc.), by which the common Jats use to distinguish their identity and to which units they owe their primary loyalty?

- (ii) Ibbeston has given the names of twentyone prominent Jat tribes of the Sikh region in the Punjab. These tribes were often at loggerheads with one another. 'Villages quarelled with villages, tribes with tribes, and weaker among them were always liable to be ousted by the stronger and the more compact. There is no instance, except in the Sikh movement, of these Jat tribes having risen above their respective clannish or tribal loyalties and to have made common for a joint undertaking, much less for a noble purpose.
- (iii) The Jats are known for their democratic spirit within the Jat brotherhood, but they are averse to sharing it with the so-called lower castes. How is it, they overcame this aversion and actively collaborated in a spirit of comradeship with sweepers, carpenters, Kalaals, Calico-printers weavers and the like, and even worked under their leadership? Again, why the Jats among the Khalsa Dal, agreed to accept the leadership of only two of the five Jathas, that were formed when the Taruna Dal was divided for the purpose of capturing political power by the Khalsa. And, why did the Jat leaders of what later came to be called the Ramgarhia Missal, hand over, on their own and without any pressure, the leadership of that Missal to the carpenters if they were aiming at Jat ascendancy? And how is it that, as soon as the period of ideological ascendancy weakened, the same Jats were again, in no small measure, responsible for lowering the social status of these various castes from the level it had been raised to by the movement?
- (iv) All observers, Indian and European, unite in remarking about the wonderful patience and resolution with which about 700 prisoners taken along with Banda faced their execution.

‘Although life was promised to those who became Muhammadans, not one prisoner proved false to his faith. Could such depth of conviction be born out of tribal consciousness of the Jats?’

- (v) Qazi Nur Mohummad pays them tribute on two specific points : that they were very strict in respecting the honour of women and would not befriend thieves. It is on these very two counts that the comments of later competent observers are unfavourable to the Jats. What, if not Sikh ideology, brought about this contrast in the cultural behaviour of the same elements at different periods of their history?

(g) *The Devi cult, the Jats and the Khalsa*

Another hypothesis advanced is that the synthesis of the Devi cult with the Jat culture had much to do with the evolution of the militancy in the Panth, in inspiring it to deeds of valour and playing a determining role in history.

This suggestion is self-contradictory. For, while, on the one hand, it completely ignores the basic role played by the Gurus’ ideology in the development of militancy in the Panth and the creation of the Khalsa, on the other hand, it banks on an alien religious inspiration that goaded the Jats to militarize the movement and to fight zealously for socio-religious causes. In other words, the argument concedes that the Jat culture, left to itself, was incapable of galvanizing the Jats for a purposeful military action. The assumption is not only very conjectural, but misses all established facts:

- (i) Guru Hargobind went to Kiratpur after having finished all his battles in the plains. So the question of Jat Sikhs or Guru Hargobind getting inspiration from the Devi cult becomes an anachronism.
- (ii) When Guru Hargobind was at Kiratpur, one Sikh named Bahiro cut off the nose of the Devi’s idol. When the hill Raja complained to the Guru of this, the Sikh’s answer was, how the Devi, that could not protect herself, could save others. This indicates what respect the Sikhs had for the Devi.

- (iii) The news-writer, who reported to the emperor about the founding of the Khalsa, specifically mentioned Durga as one of the deities which the Guru forbade the Sikhs from paying homage.
- (iv) The various forms of Devi are the consorts of Sive; hence Devi-worship cannot be advocated by one who decries Siva worship. There are many verses of Guru Gobind Singh to this effect.
- (v) If the number of important temples built and fairs held in honour of the various forms of Devi are an indication of the prevalence of the Devi cult, it should be the least common among the Jats of the Sikhs region. Because such temple and fairs are the most common in the hilly tracts of the Himachal. Next comes Harayana, but in the Sikh Jat tract there is only one such temple. The Bhaddar Kali temple at Niazbeg is about 7 miles from Lahore and has only a local reputation. The fair which was held there was attended by people who collected from Amritsar and Lahore towns and the neighbouring villages. As this part of Lahore district is not a Sikh majority area (for that reason it forms a part of Pakistan), it is not unreasonable to surmise that the number of the Jat Sikhs attending this fair was never large. As against this, there are many important Devi temples scattered all over the eastern districts (i.e. Haryana). Rose who has not omitted to note even petty cultural practice like those of the Sikh water-carriers worshipping Bhairo, make no mention that Sikh Jats worship the Devi.

If the cult of Devi had inspired the Jats who visited Anandpur, how is it that it disappeared altogether from among them afterwards? If the Sikh water-carriers, who from a microscopic minority among the Sikh population, could retain Bhairo worship, why could not the Jats retain Devi worship? Also, if the Rajputs of hilly Punjab, which is the home of Devi cult, and the Hindu Jats of Haryana, where the Devi cult is common enough, could not be inspired by it to take up arms for higher religious or political ends, how is it that it inspired

only the Sikhs Jats, whose visits to Kiratpur or Anandpur to pay their respects to the Guru were very short and occasional?

3. Response to Economic Problems

It has also been suggested that the militarization of the Sikh movement was the result of the economic pressures. Agrarian troubles were no doubt one of the factors for the downfall of the Mughal empire. Religious persecution of non-Muslims was another reason. Rattan Singh Bhangu has not ignored the fact that those who were oppressed by the state or the administration joined the Khalsa. But the question is, why, in the Punjab, the Khalsa alone became the centre of resistance? Why did the Kashmiri Pandits travel all the way to Anandpur? Why did the Jats of Haryana, who were in no way less oppressed, build no resistance on their own? If economic causes or religious persecution alone, without an ideology, an oriented leadership and an organization, could give rise to movements, then there should have been a general revolt throughout the length and breadth of the country. But nothing of the kind happened.

There were, in broad terms, four types of peasant upheavals. Firstly there were the uprisings which the common exploited peasants undertook on their own. These were sporadic and unorganised, and instead of bearing any fruit invited further oppression and misery. Secondly, there were peasant revolts built around the leadership of Zamindars, as distinguished from Jagirdars, which were localized affairs. These when successful either served the personal ends of the local Zamindars or ended merely in plunderings. If the Zamindars could unite for a common purpose, they would have become a force to reckon with, because the total number of their armed retainers, as estimated by Abul-Fazl, was 44 Lakhs. The third category was the successful revolt of Bharatpur Jats on caste lines, where Jats fought as Jats. It had only the limited objective of establishing the rule of a Jat family. The fourth category comprised the Satnami revolt and the Sikh movement, wherein, along with the peasants, the other lower castes also played a major role. Here also, the Satnami revolt was in the nature of an ephemeral flareup. It collapsed suddenly and did not carry on any sustained struggle, because it lacked preplanned objectives and a determined leadership. It was only in the Sikh movement that we find

the combination of objective conditions with a distinct ideology, clear-cut revolutionary aims to be achieved, and an inspired and determined leadership. This is the reason why its course and character were different from those of others and lasted for over three generations even after the demise of Guru Gobind Singh. The responses to economic problems were, thus, not uniform. It is, therefore, idle to trace the source of a revolutionary movement, divorced from its ideology and leadership, to sheer economic causes.

Appendix B

Sikh Tradition as a Source of Historical Testimony

1. Paucity of Evidence

Some historians are disinclined to give much credit to tradition as a source of historical testimony. In a country, where the recording of history, according to its present-day discipline, was practically unknown, where there was no sense of proportion in computing periods of time which were counted in Yugas, where a great deal of research is required to distinguish one Vikramajit King from the other of his namesake, to reject outright evidence which can be extracted from tradition virtually amounts to writing off a substantial part of its history. Max Weber has expressed the view that 'It is no accident that India has produced no historiography to speak of. The interest in historically unique forms of political and social relations was far too weak for a man contemplating life and its passage.¹ Whatever be the reason, the fact is that, leaving out the accounts provided by the foreign Chinese, Greek and Muslim travellers and historians, Indian history upto the medieval period, left entirely to its indigenous sources of information, would have been reduced a negligible part. If this is the position with regard to important political dynasties and events, the paucity of information regarding movements, which were not in harmony with the orthodox ideology and system, can be easily understood. A cursory reading of the Bhakatmal, the one original account covering the medieval Bhakti movements, shows that there is very little of authentic historical significance that one can derive from it. Even the parentage of

soms Bhaktas is doubt.

The Sikh movement was, in addition, a revolutionary movement. The revolutionaries had to keep their vital secrets to themselves and, because they were engaged in a life and death struggle, they could have little time at their hands for recording history. Also, it was plebian movement. Under the caste system all literary activities were confined to the elite castes. Those who joined the Sikh movement were mostly illiterate, drawn from the lower castes. Guru Gobind Singh started a records office at Anandpur, but whatever records were there were lost when Anandpur was besieged and had to be abandoned. These considerations make it plain that, in reconstructing the history of the Sikh movement, one should not expect the detail and thoroughness of the historical evidence one finds in European historiography. One has to make the best of whatever is available. In any case, the paucity of historical evidence about a point should not be used as a cover for filling the gaps, if any, with even less plausible hypotheses.

2. Hagiographical

Another exception taken to the acceptance of Sikh tradition as a source of historical evidence is that a part of it is of hagiographical nature or is mixed up with religious faith. This again is a feature common to Indian tradition where all life activities were viewed and expressed in religious terms. Muslim historians of India were no more free of religious bias. The accounts of India given by Chinese travellers, Huien Tshang, Fahien and others, are full of credulous stories. Strabo calls similar accounts given by the Greeks as lies.² It is not suggested that the Sikh tradition should be accepted uncritically. All we say is that it should not be given short shrift on this account, and the grain should be sifted from the chaff as it is done in the case of Chinese, Greek and Muslim accounts.

3. Originality of Tradition

It has been seen (Chapter V) that Brahminism showed remarkable dexterity and flexibility in distorting heterodox ideologies and weaving and presenting them into pattern which conformed or approximated to the orthodox school and its social

order. The Sikh tradition was not immune from such subtle influence; especially so in the case of the Sikh writers who were drawn from the Brahmin and Khatri castes and could not shake off completely the caste prejudices they had inherited. Therefore, the Sikh tradition which highlights anti-casteism and the pro-plebain character of the movement is all more weighty because it survived the backlog of the caste heritage. The anti-casteism of the Sikh tradition could not be born out of the caste society, and the pro-plebian tradition could never raise either out of the caste society or out of class-cum-religious domination of the Muslim polity. The only other source of egalitarian values could be the impact of European interpreters in his time of the Sikh canonical writings and of these few or none was capable of giving an English interpretation. We have refrained from advancing testimony from Sikh sources belonging to have been coloured by European influence. It is very significant that the egalitarian character of movement drew more appreciative notice in early European accounts of the Sikhs than from medieval Muslim or Hindu historians. Hence, the anti-caste ideology and pro-plebian Sikh tradition is the product of the Sikh movement itself and represents it more truly. Where a Sikh writer mixes up the true Sikh tradition with his own bias, borrowed from his family heritage or the surrounding caste milieu, we should give more weight to that part of his statement which reveals the originality of the tradition. We take a particular example to illustrate this point.

Chaupa Singh was a Brahmin before he became a Sikh. In his Rehatnama, he writes:

“The Muktas (the liberated ones or the ideologically pure Sikh) preached : ‘Sikhs should have marriage alliances only with Sikhs. Make no distinctions as to whether the Sikh is Khatri, Sood or Viash. Only ensure that the party is Sikh. Keep no consideration of caste whatsoever’ Since some Sikhs had mental reservations in this regard, it was suggested that it would be better to have the instructions endorsed by the Guru, because then persons would have no hesitation

in following them.... The Muktas placed the matter in writing before the Guru, who said, 'I have created the Panth for the sake of maintaining the Dharm. I do not want it to lose its purity.' The Granth says: 'The distinction of good and bad is obliterated, and no one thinks of religion.' All the four castes have the same status. I consider all of them to be equal and of one brotherhood. There is no doubt on this score. The Muktas are the life of my life. What they say is approved by me.^{2a}

In the same Rehatnama, Chaupa Singh writes at another place, 'The Sikh should have marriage alliance only with a Sikh, 'preferably have alliance with a poor Sikh. Such a step brings them nearer to the Guru.

Yet, Chaupa Singh, as his writings show, retained his prejudice against inter-caste marriages. He has quoted Guru Nanak's hymn, "All the people have become of one Varna; the path of Dharma is sullied." From this hymn Chaupa Singh appears to draw the inference that the Guru did not approve of intermarriage between castes. But, this sentence of the hymn is only sequence of the previous part of the hymn which says that "The Kshatriyas have given up their Dharma by owing the foreign language." As there is no other mention of Varna (Caste) in the rest of the hymn, and people could not be reduced to one Varna just by owing the foreign language, the right interpretation of the hymn is that all people have been reduced to the same low level by collaborating with the foreign rulers. Thus Chaupa Singh's evidence about anti-casteism carries unusual weight. He retains his caste prejudice and puts a wrong interpretation on the hymn in support of his view, but he is constrained to state that the Guru regarded all the four castes as of equal status and clearly advised that the instructions of the Muktas regarding inter-caste marriages had his approval.

The originality of the Sikh tradition, on some points, helps us to view other questions in their proper perspective. For example, it is said that the Janamsakhis were recorded some sixty years after the death of Guru Nanak; hence these cannot be regarded as weighty evidence of Guru Nanak's life and mission. This problem can be seen in a different light as well. The testimony of the later-recorded Sikh tradition on those points, in which it runs counter to the Indian tradition

in general and the caste tradition in particular, only shows how strong and persistent such tradition must have been to survive the ideological pervasiveness of caste, and how close it must have been to the genuine Sikh movement since it could not be the characterization of the movement as a whole, where chronology is relatively not so important, it does not, therefore, make much of a difference as to whether such evidence was recorded contemporarily or a little later.

4. Overall view

Just as it is necessary to take an overall view of the movement, so it is in assessing the Sikh tradition. This becomes all the more important because the Sikh movement was in certain respects so radically different from the Indian tradition that its full implications were not likely to be understood by all of its participants. In deciding about the ideological line, the hymns of the Guru, as embodied in the Guru Granth, are the final criterion. As to the events relating to history, one should not attach undue importance to those minor details which are at variance with the overall character and direction of the movement. Here also we illustrate our point with reference to two important controversial issues.

There is a hymn in the Bichitar Natak which runs in the original as:

‘Babe ke Babar ke Dou, ap kare Parmesar sou,
Deen sah in ko pehchano; duni pat un kao anmano.’

This hymn has been rendered by Macauliffe as:

‘The successors of both Baba Nanak and Babar
Were created by Gob Himself,
Recongize the former as a spiritual,
And the latter as a temporal king.
Babar’s successors shall seize and plunder those
Who deliver not the Guru’s money.’³

This hymn has been construed by interpreting the word ‘recognize’, to mean that Guru Gobind Singh conceded; ‘Render unto

Caesar what is Ceasar's. The Punjabi words in the original text, which Macauliffe has translated as 'recognize', are 'pehchano' and 'anmano'. The English equivalents of the Punjabi word 'Pachan' (as given by the Punjabi Dictionary, Maya Singh, 1895; Munshi Gulab Singh and Sons, Lahore) are: recognition, knowledge, acquaintance, distinction, criterion, type, discrimination; and that of the Punjabi word 'Anman' are: inference, supposition, hypothesis, conjecture, analogy (in logic), conclusion, respect, consideration. There is another hymn of Guru Gobind Singh: "Tanko kar pahan anmanat," which is translated by Macauliffe as "The great fool supposeth that God is a stone", thus rendering 'anmanat' as 'supposeth'. English Punjabi Dictionary of the Punjabi University, Patiala, gives the following Punjabi equivalents for the word 'know': janana, pachanana, samjana, waqfiat honi, janu hona, gian hona, samaj jana, sojhi honi.

It is clear from the text in which the above hymn is used that the words 'pahchano' and 'anmano' mean 'know' or 'understand', and not 'recognize' in the senses of owing allegiance to the temporal king. Aurangzeb sent his son Bahadur Shah to punish the hill chiefs. On hearing the news of his advance, some of the Guru's followers, particularly the Masands, deserted the Guru. In that campaign, the house of these deserters were also destroyed by the Mughals. An attempt was made to frighten the Guru (in order to make him also leave the place), but the Guru says such people did not understand the secret of God. The Guru does not advise people to own allegiance to the temporal authority; but on the contrary, he admonishes, in the hymns preceding the following the one in question, those who deserted the Guru for fear of the prince, and holds out their example to show how such people suffer. Paraphrased, the hymn would mean; "The forces of good and evil are both created by Gob Himself; know or understand, (pehchano or anmano) that the former is represented by the house of Baba Nanak and the latter by the house of Babar; those who do not follow the Guru will come to grief at the hands of the house of Babar.' The substance of the idea expressed above is to new, as it is to be found also in Guru Nanak's hymns where he comments on Babar's invasion. In those hymns, the Guru clearly states that the

forces of evil are also created by God, and that the people suffered from Babar's invasion because they did not follow God's path.⁴

Secondly, in the same Bichitar Natak, Guru Gobind Singh says that he was sent by God to extirpate the tyrants (i.e. obviously the Mughal rulers) and lauds the martyrdom of his father for that mission. He spent his won life in fighting the Mughals and sacrificed his four sons for that cause. Nowhere else, either in the hymns of Guru Gobind Singh or those of the Guru Granth, is there a reference to the duality of allegiance that the Sikhs can share between temporal and spiritual authorities. The Gurus who as compared to God, belittled the authority of gods, goddesses, Avtaras and prophets, could not be expected to make an exception in the case of temporal kings. Thus, that interpretation of an isolated passage should not be given undue weight which is torn out of the text, as in this case, or out of the context of the movement as a whole, or which runs counter to its character and direction.

The second issue is raised by Indubhusan Banerjee. He has tried to prove that the Gurus were not against the wearing of the 'sacred thread' (Janeo). He has cited Dabistan to show that Guru Nanak himself wore the Janeo and has referred to the story wherein Daya Singh offered his Janeo to Guru Gobind Singh as substitute for his broken swordbelt.⁵ Indubhusan omits to mention that, in the same passage of Dabistan, Guru Nanak is said to have had both the Janeo and the Tasbi (the string of Mohammadan prayer-beads). In the story referring to Daya Singh. He (Daya Singh) refused to wear the sacred thread again when some Sikhs tried to persuade him to do so, and Guru Gobind Singh appreciated Daya Singh's stand. The Guru did not remain silent as Indubhusan says but was very much pleased (magnand).⁶ Moreover, the important point is not whether the Janeo was worn or not. The point is whether it was worn as a symbol of twice-born Aryanhood. If Guru Nanak had both the Janeo and Tasbi, it was just to show that he belonged both to Hindus and Muslims. If Daya Singh had regarded Janeo as an indispensable token of his Aryanhood, which it is for twice-born Hindus, he would not have parted with it, atleast not refused to wear it again. The fact is that the

Sikh Gurus were not only social reformers, they had also more urgent revolutionary tasks to accomplish. Therefore, they did not want to alienate unnecessarily their only recruiting grounds of volunteers for that purpose. This is why they did not insist that the sacred thread should be discarded by one and all. In the sequel to the story of Daya Singh, it is clearly stated that Sikhs should neither insist on wearing nor on discarding of Janeo by their follow-religionists.⁷ However, where there was danger of a Sikh relapsing into the caste ideology on account of wearing of Janeo, Guru Gobind Singh took away the Janeo of Alam Singh.⁸ Therefore, any stray account about the wearing of Janeo should be assessed in the context of the Guru's own hymns on the subjects, as also in the light of the anti-racial and anti-caste stance of the movement as well as in the light of the greater number of anti-Janeo references given in the Sikh tradition.⁹ In addition, we have the historical evidence from non-Sikh sources. Ghulam Mohyy-ud-Din states: 'Other heretics put Janeo round their necks; they (Singhs) alone put iron chains round the necks.'¹⁰ Latif writes: 'The Maharaja (Ranjit Singh) wished Ram Lal to give up the Brahmanical thread and receive the Sikh initiation of the Pahul of the Guru, as his brother had done; but the most seductive efforts availed not to Ram Lal induce to comply with is master's wish. The Maharaja becoming urgent on the point, Ram Lal, with the connivance of his brother, fled to Hindustan....'¹¹ The latter quotation is unequivocal and very significant. All accounts agree that the caste usages were, to begin with introduced in the Sikh society primarily during Ranjit Singh's reign. This paid him to strengthen his feudal set-up. Therefore, for even Ranjit Singh to insist that Ram Lal should discard the janeo clearly shows that the practice of discarding the janeo as a condition for joining the Khalsa must have been too strong even in Ranjit Singh's times for him to ignore it. It equally shows how strongly the Hindus regarded the wearing of the janeo as an indispensable condition for remaining in the caste society.

5. Corroborative Evidence from Non-Sikh Sources

Historical evidence from non-Sikh sources, howsoever meagre, which corroborates the general character and direction of the Sikh movement, is very important, because it comes from the quarters which

are hostile or indifferent towards its ideology and its objectives. As historians are apt to take notice of only glaring events, the Sikh movement did not draw much attention upto its rise under Banda. The testimony of Muslim and Hindu historians about the plebian character and achievement of the Sikhs under Banda and thereafter is all the more valuable because they are constrained to state what is obviously unpalatable to them. The only appreciative note struck by the non-Sikh writers about the egalitarian character of the Sikh movement is that found in early European accounts of the Sikhs. Their writings are also valuable because these show the extent to which the movement had retained its egalitarian spirit even in the post-revolutionary phase of the Missals and Ranjit Singh. The historical testimony from non-Sikh source bears it out, by an large, that the Sikh tradition about the main features of the Sikh movement is correct and consistent.

6. Important Features

(a) Separate Identity

A perusal of the Janamsakhis, both of Bhai Bala and Meharban, leaves no doubt that their authors were very much steeped in the orthodox Hindu lore and tradition. Their evidence, therefore, that Guru Nanak was 'neither a Hindu nor a Musalman' assumes added significance's in establishing the separate identity of his mission. Koer Singh clearly states that Guru Gobind Singh rejected the paths of both the Hindus and the Muslims and created his own Panth.¹² The Rehatnamas, which emphasize that Sikhs should maintain their separate identity from the from the caste-society, were written, according to Piara Singh Padam, in the eighteenth century. References to corroborative evidence on this point from non-Sikh sources have been made in the text here and there. In spite of this, it is suggested that the movement to separate the Sikh Panth from the caste-society started with the Singh Sabha movement towards the end of nineteenth century. The episode of Ranjit Singh and Ram Lal, referred to earlier, knocks out the bottom of this suggestion. The consciousness of their separate identity from the caste society by the Sikhs had, no doubt, touched a very low point after their defeat by the British. But, the

Singh Sabha movement merely resurrected the old tradition in this respect and did not reconstruct it.

(b) *Egalitarian Character*

All that has been said in the preceding section applies with greater force to the Sikh tradition which shows the egalitarian character of the Sikh movement. To establish an egalitarian Panth was a much more difficult task and a vital departure from the caste society than the creation of a mere separate entity. The egalitarian character of the movement is also vouchsafed by evidence from non-Sikh sources (Chapter XI and XVI), and it covers, of course, automatically its separate identity from the caste society.

(c) *Militarization*

The militarization of the Sikh movement is a fact of history which has got to be explained. It was not only a militarization, but a militarization for a revolutionary plebian purpose. All that we ask in this respect is that the evidence of the Sikh tradition and the other that we have advanced in support of our thesis should be weighed against the evidence on which alternative hypotheses are built (Appendix A). The fact of the militarization for a revolutionary purpose cannot be wished away on the plea of insufficiency of historical evidence. The choice from the alternatives open to us has got to be made.

(d) *Plebian Political Objectives and Character*

The plebian political objectives of the Sikh movement could not obviously be born out of the caste society or of the foreign class-dominated Muslim polity. In fact, the capturing of the political power by the plebian was nowhere on the agenda of the world at that time. The near-contemporary evidence of Koer Singh records that Guru Gobind Singh bestowed sovereignty on the Khalsa, and the later-recorded evidence of Gurbilas Chevin Patshahi, Rehatnamas, and Bhangu is no less valuable; because it incorporates a tradition which could only be the Sikhs' own. Bhangu's 'Prachin Panth Parkash' is an invaluable piece of history. He relates that genuine Sikh old tradition about the separate identity of the Panth, its egalitarian character, and

the plebian political objectives and character of the Khalsa which was preserved even in that post-revolutionary period when the Sikh movement had passed into a veiled autocracy and the orthodox caste ideology and made inroads into the Sikh society. Fortunately, the corroborative evidence from non-Sikh sources about the plebian political character of the movement (Chapter XI, XII and XVIII) is sufficient enough. And this feature of the Sikh Revolution proves ipso-facto the other main features of the movement as well. There could have been plebian Sikh political Revolution without the Khalsa having an egalitarian base. That means the Sikh Panth had carved out its way across caste barriers, and this very fact was enough to separate it from the caste society.

Appendix C

Some Aspects of the Ideology of the Radical Bhaktas

1. Human Equality

All things are subject to the Commander's order;
He is fearless and regardeth all alike.

(Namdev: Macauliffe, Vol. vi, p. 75)

Be it thy duty to look on all men as equal; *(Kabir: Ibid, p. 152)*

So the man who looketh on all with an equal eye,
shall become pure and blend with the Infinite. *(Kabir, Ibid, p. 249)*

The Supreme Ruler is no man's heritage; He
belongeth to him who loveth Him. *(Ravidas, Ibid, p. 329)*

2. Non-sectarian

The Hindus worship their temple, the Musalmans their mosque.
Nama worshippeth Him who hath neither temple nor mosque.

(Namdev, Ibid, p. 58)

Saith Kabir, I sing God's praises,
And instruct both Hindus and Musalmans.

(Kabir, Ibid, p. 202)

Kabir loudly proclaimeth-there is the
same God for the Hindus as for the Muhammadan.

(Kabir, Ibid, p. 212)

Forswearing sects, I look on all as equal
and meditate on the one Name.

(Kabir, Ibid, p. 249)

Kabir is child of Ram and Allah, and accepteth

all gurus and pirs.

(*Kabir, Ibid, p. 277*)

3. Scriptural Authority

The endless songs and poetry of the Veds, Purans,
and Shastars I will not sing;

(*Namdev, Ibid, p.59*)

O my brethren, the Simriti is the daughter of the Veds;
She hath brought a chain and a rope for men,
And hath of herself imprisoned them in her capital;

(*Kabir, Ibid, p.156*)

Saith Kabir, they are good riders

Who keep themselves aloof from the

Veds and the books of the Musalmans. (*Kabir, Ibid, p.156*)

The Musalmans accept the Tariqat; the Hindus the Veds and
Purans; but for me the books of both religions are useless.

(*Kabir Ibid. p.182*)

If what are merits and what demerits be decided by listening to
the Veds and Purans, doubt shall result.

(*Ravdas, Ibid p.324*)

4. The Brahmin

Thou art a Brahman, I am a Banaras weaver, understand my instruction.

Thou beggest from lords and kings while I meditate on God;
which of us is better?

(*Kobir Ibid, p. 125*)

While dwelling in the womb man hath not family or caste;

All men have sprung from the seed of Brahm.

Say, O Pandit, since when hast thou been a Brahman,

Waste not thy life in calling thyself a Brahman,

If thou art a Brahman born of a Brahmani mother,

Why hast thou not come by some other way?

How art thou a Brahman? How am I a Sudar?

How am I of blood and you of milk?

(*Kobir, Ibid p. 146*)

Kabir, the Brahman is the guru of the world,

but he is not the guru of the saints;

He killeth himself over the perplexities of the four Veds.

(*Kabir Ibid, p. 315*)

5. The Caste

Saith Kabir, renounce family, caste and lineage, become an ant,
and thou canst pick up and eat the sugar. (*Kabir, Ibid, p. 247*)

He whose mind loveth to consider whetJter a man's caste is high or low,
Chanteth the hymn of egoism. (*Kobir Ibid, p. 267*)

6. Gods, Goddesses and Avtars

They who worship Bhairav shall become sprites;
They who worship Sitala shall ride on donkeys and scatter dust-
For myself I take the name of one God;
I would give all other gods in exchange for it.
They who repeat the name of Shiv and worship him,
ShaH ride on an ox and play the drum;
They who worship the great mother Durge,
Shall be born as a women instead of men. (*Namdev, Ibid, p. 57*)
You waver and know not the supreme God,
Wherefore you worship gods and goddesses. (*Kabir Ibid, p. 163*)
He hath millions of Shivs and Kailases;
Millions of Durgas shampoo his limbs;
Millions of Brahmas recite the Veds for Him-
If I beg, let me beg only of God;
I have naught to do with any other god. . .
Millions of Indars wait on Him;. . .
And Rams who out-generalled Rawan's army,
And Krishns who humbled the pride of Duryodhan.

(*Kabir Ibid, pp. 268, 269*)

Kabir, call Him Ram who is omnipresent; we must discriminate
in mentioning the two Rams; The one Ram (God) is contained in all
things; the other (Ram Chander) is only contained in one thing, himself.
(*Kabir, Ibid, p. 308*)

He who forsaking God the diamond yearneth for other gods,
Shall go to hell, verily saith Ravdas.

(*Ravdas, Ibid, p. 316*)

7. Idolatory and Ceremonialism

One stone is adored,
Another is trodden under foot:
If one is a god, the other is also a god-
Saith Namdev, I worship the true God. (*Namdev, Ibid, pp. 44-45*)
If God be found by worshipping a stone.
I will worship a mountain; (*Kabir, Ibid, p. 140*)

Saith Kabir, why perform *so* many ceremonies?

(*Kabir, Ibid, p. 145*)

There are many places for ablutions, O foolish man, and many gods to worship.

Saith Kabir, thou shall not be saved by means of these,
O foolish man; thou shalt be saved by the worship of God.

(*Kabir, Ibid, p. 173*)

Endure not the torture of absurd religious ceremonies,

(*Kabir, Ibid, p. 191*)

If salvation is obtained by bathing in water, the frogs which are continually bathing will obtain it,

But as the frogs so the pilgrims; they shall be *born* again and again.

(*Kabir, Ibid, p. 215*)

If God dwells only in the mosque, to whom belongeth the rest of the country?

They who are called Hindus say that God dwelleth in an idol:

I see not the truth in either sect.....

The Brahmans yearly perform twenty-four fastings on the eleventh day of the dark and light halves of the lunar month; The Musalmans fast in the month of Ramzan.....

What availeth the Hindus to bathe at Jagannath in Urisa (Orissa), what the Musalmans to bow their heads in a mosque?

With deception in their hearts they repeat prayers; what availeth them to go on a pilgrimage to Makka? (*Kabir, Ibid, p. 276*)

Kabir, I was going on a pilgrimage to the Kaaba, and I met God on the way;

The Lord fell aquarrelling with me, 'Who ordered thee to go to that place?' (*Kabir, Ibid, p. 309*)

8. Pollution

There is impurity in water, there is impurity in land, there is impurity in whatever is born.

There is impurity in birth, and again in death;

God's subjects are ruined by this impurity.

O Pandit, tell me who is pure; (*Kabir, Ibid, p. 161*)

.They scrub their vessels, and put them on fires whose wood hath been washed;

They dig up the earth, make two fire-places, and eat up men whole!

Those sinners ever wander in evil deeds, yet they call themselves
Aparas. (*Kabir, Ibid, p. 196*)

Thy mother was impure, thy father was also impure, and impure is the
fruit they have borne.

The unlucky people came impure, they departed and died impure.

Tell me, O Pandit, what place is pure

Where I may sit and take my food.

My tongue is impure, what it saith is impure, the ears and eyes are all
impure.

The impurity of the senses departeth not, O thou who art burning
with Brahmanical wrath.

Fire is also impure, water is impure, and impure the place where thou
sittest and cookest it.

With an impure laddle it is served up, and impure are those who sit
and eat it.

Impure thy cow-dung, impure thy cooking-square, and impure the lines
which mark it out.

Saith Kabir, that man is pure who hath obtained true knowledge.

(*Kabir, Ibid, p. 273*)

The calf hath defiled milk in the Cow's udder by tasting it;

The bumble-bee hath spoiled the flowers, and the fish the water-

My mother, where shall I find anything *to* offer in God's worship 1.....

I cannot perform Thine adoration and worship according to Hindu
rites.

(*Ravdas, Ibid, pp. 327-328*)

Appendix D

Some Aspects of Sikh Ideology

1. Human Equality

Religion consisteth not in mere words;

He who looketh on all men as equal is religious.

(Macauliffe, i, p. 60)

Call everyone exalted; let no one appear to thee low,

The one God fashioned the vessels, and it is His light that filleth the three worlds.

(Macauliffe i, p. 274)

O whom shall we call good or evil;

When 'all creatures belong to Thee.

(Guru Granth, p. 383)

There is one father, we are His children;

Thou art our Teacher.

(Guru Granth, p. 611)

2. Non-sectarian, Universal

Some but call Thee Rama, while by others Thou art Known as Khuda.

Yea;some Serve Thee as *Gosain*, others as *Allah*. (1)

But, O Beneficent Lord, Thou art only the One Doer and the Cause.

So Bless me Thou with Thy Mercy. (I-Pause)

Some go to the (Hindus') Pilgrim stations, others go to perform *Hajj*,

Some offer Thee oblations, while others bow before Thee. (2)

Some but read the Vedas, others the Western Texts,

Yea, some are robed in white, others in blue. (3)

Some are called Turks, others are termed Hindus,

Some seek the (Hindus') heaven, others the (Muslims') Paradise. (4).

Sayeth Nanak : “He, who Realiseth the Lord’s Will,
He (alone) knoweth the Mystery of his Lord, the God.” (5-9)
(Guru Granth, p. 885; trans. by Gopal Singh, Vol. iii, p. 842)

Sayeth Nanak : “The Guru hath rid me of my Doubt:
And now I See Allah and the Transcendent Brahma as one.”
(Guru Granth, 897; trans. by Gopal Singh, Vol. W, p. 855)

The temple and the mosque are the same; the Hindu worship and the Musalman prayer are the same; all men are the same; it is through error they appear different. Allah and Abhekh are the same; the Purans and the Quran are the same; they are all alike; it is the one God who created all.

(Macauliffe, Vol. V, pp. 275-276)

What is a Hindu or a Musalman to him
From whose heart doubt departeth?

The Muhammadans use tasbis, the Hindus malas:

The former read the Quran and the latter the Purans,

Fools have died over the discussion;

They were not imbued with God’s deep love. *(Macauliffe, V, p. 308)*

He whose doubt hath departed; for him there is no difference
between Hindu and Turk.

(Introduction to Chaubis Avtar, Dasam Granth)

3. Scriptural Authority

Beyond the ken of the Vedas and the Semitic Texts,

Yea, the whole world is He.

(Guru Granth, p. 397; trans. by Gopal Singh, ii, p. 393).

Entanglements are Veds, religious discussions, and pride.

(Macauliffe, i, p. 317).

Of no avail to Brahma was the study of the Vedas, for profound
not the True Worth of the Lord.

(Guru Granth, p. 747; trans. by Gopal Singh Vol. ai, p. 715)

Many Shastras I searched through and Smritis too,

They equal not the Name of the Lord, for,
invaluable is the Lord’s Name.

(Guru Granth, p. 265; trans. by Gopal Singh, Vol. i, p. 256).

God’s secret is not found in the Veds or the books of the Musalmans;

He hath not father or mother or son or brother. (*Macauliffe, i, p. 362*).

The drum of the Veds loudly resoundeth for many a faction.

Remember God's name, Nanak; there is none but Him.

(*Macauliffe, i, p. 369*)

The Simritis and the Shastars define good and evil, but they know nothing of the Real Thing; (*Macauliffe, ii, p. 125*)

They who were smitten by the Smritis

Abandoned My worship.

They who attached their hearts to My feet

Did not walk in the way of the Simritis.

Brahma made the four Veds

And caused all to act according to them;

But they whose love was attached to My feet

Renounced the Veds.

They who abandoned the tenets of the Veds and of other religious books,

Became devoted to Me, the supreme God

They who shrink from suffering,

And, forsaking Me, adopt the way of the Veds and Simritis Shall fall into the pit of hell, (*Macauliffe, Vol. V, p. 298*)

Since I have embraced Thy feet I have paid regard to none besides.

The Purans of Ram (the God of the Hindus) and the Quran of Rahim (the God of the Musalmans) express various opinions, but I accept none of them.

The Simritis, the Shastars, and the Veds all expound many different doctrines, but I accept none of them.

O holy God, by Thy favour it is not I who have been speaking; all that hath been said hath been said by Thee.

(*Macauliffe, Vol. V, p. 310*)

4. The Brahmin

You read books, perform your twilight devotions, argue, worship stones, and sit like cranes;

You utter falsehoods as excellent jewels; you meditate on the Gayatri three times a day;

You wear necklaces, put sacrificial marks on your foreheads, carry two dhotis, and put towels on your heads.

If you knew God's designs, you *would know that yours* is verily a vain religion. *(Macauliffe, i, p. 237)*

They who have strings oa their necks eat men, recite the Muhammadan prayers,

And use knives to cut men's throats. Although the Brahmans sound shells in their houses, And enjoy their viands as they do themselves; Yet false is their capital and false their dealings. By uttering falsehood they maintain themselves. Far from them is the abode of bashfulness and honesty: Nanak, falsehood everywhere prevaieth.

On their foreheads are sacrificial marks; on their waists reddish dhotis; And in their hands knives; they are the world's butchers.

(Macauliffe, i, p. 240)

The Pandit readeth and then instructeth others,

But knoweth he not that his own House is on fire.

(Guru Granth, p. 1046; trans. by Gopal Singh. Vol. iv, p. 999)

Without such strings the Brahman wandereth astray,

Twisteth strings for the neck, and putteth them on others.

He taketh hire for marrying;

He pulleth out a paper, and showeth the fate of the wedded pair.

Hear and see, ye people, it is strange

That man, while mentally blind, is named wise. *(Macauliffe, Vol. i, p. 18)*

Even beasts have their merits; for the oil-cake they eat they give milk, but the Brahmans make no return for the offerings made them. *(Macauliffe, Vol. i, p. 323)*

The Qazi telleth lies and eateth filth.

The Brahman taketh life and then batheth.

The ignorant Jogi knoweth not the way of union with God-

The whole three ruin the world. *(Macauliffe, Vol. i, p. 338)*

5. The Caste

According to the Hindus foul is the ablution of the Chandal, and vain are his religious ceremonies and decorations.

False is the wisdom of the perverse; their acts produce strife.
In the impure man is pride; he obtaineth not the flavour of the Lord.
(*Macauliffe, i, p. 379*)

The lowliest of the lowly, the lowest of the low-born,
Nanak seeks their company. The friendship of the great is vain.
For, where the weak are cared for, there doth Thy Mercy Rain.
(*Guru Granth, p. 15; trans. by Gopal Singh, Vol. i, p. 19*)

Be not proud of thy Caste:

For, he alone is *Brahmin* who Knoweth *Brahma*, the only God.

O unwise one, be not proud of thy caste.

For, a myriad errors flow out of this pride.

Everyone sayeth, "There are but four castes,

But it is from God's sperm that everyone is Born.

The same is the clay which fashions the whole world:

Yea, the same day the Potter Moulds into Vessels of all kinds.

The five elements make up the body's form,

And who can say who hath less of these or more?

(*Guru Granth, p. 1128; trans. by Gopal Singh, Vol. iv, p. 1077*)

The Vedas have given currency to the myths that make men reflect
upon (human values of) good and evil;

.....

The sense of high and low, and of caste and colour; such are the
illusions created in man,

(*Guru Granth, p. 1243; trans. by Gopal Singh Vol. iv, p. 1188*)

6. Gods, Goddesses and Avtaras

At God's gate there dwell thousands of Muhammads, thou-sands of
Brahmas, of Vishnus, and of Shivs;

Thousands upon thousands of exalted Rams, thousands of spiritual
guides, thousands of religious garbs;

Thousands upon thousands of celibates, true. men, and Sanyasis;

Thousands upon thousands of Gorakhs, thousands upon thousands
of superiors of Jogis;-

Thousands upon thousands of men sitting in attitudes of
con-templation, gurus, and their disciples who make supplications;

Thousands upon thousands of goddesses and gods, thousands of demons;

Thousands upon thousands of Muhammadan priests, pro-phets, spiritual leaders, thousands upon thousands of qazis, mullas, and sheikhs
(*Macauliffe, i, pp. 40-1*)

Nanak, the Formless One is without fear; all the Rams were dust.

How many stories there are of Krishan! how many Veds and religious compositions! (*Macauliffe, i, p. 223*).

Afflicted are Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva: yea, afflicted is the whole world;

(*Guru Granth, p. 1153; trans. by Gopal Singh, Vol. iv, p. 1102*)

Thou hast millions of times repeated the names of Krishan and Vishnu, and fully meditated on Ram Chander and the Prophet;

Thou hast repeated Brahma's name and established Shiv in thy heart, but none of them will save thee. (*Macauliffe, V, p. 288*)

One Shiv was born, one died, and one was born again; there have also been many incarnations of Ram Chander and Krishan. How many Brahmas and Vishnus have there been! how many Veds and Purans how many collections of Simritis have been and passed away!

How many priests and prophets have there been! they are so many that they cannot be counted; from dust they sprang and to dust they returned. (*Macauliffe, V, p. 272*)

How many millions of worms like Krishan

He created, built, fashioned, again destroyed and created.

(*Macauliffe, V, p. 278*)

I do not at the outset propitiate Ganesh;

I never meditate on Krishan or Vishnu;

I have heard of them- but I know them not;

It is only God's feet I love. (*Macauliffe, V, pp. 310-311*)

As God spoke to me I speak,

I pay no regard to anyone besides.

I am satisfied with no religious garb;

I sow the seed of the Invisible.

I am not a worshipper of stones,
Nor am I satisfied with any religious garb.

.....

I will pay no regard to anyone but God.

.....

I will not repeat any other name,
Nor establish any other God in my heart. (*Macauliffe, V, p. 300*)

7. Idolatory and Ceremonialism

O Brahman, thou worshippest and propitiatest the sala-gram, and deemest it a good act to wear a necklace of sweet basil.

Why irrigate barren land and waste thy life? (*Macauliffe, i, p. 61*)

Man See-eth not the Lord within his Self,
and displays the stone-god upon his neck.

.....

The stone that he calleth his god,

That stone in the end drowns him along with itself.

(Guru Granth, p. 739; trans, by Gopal Singh, Vol. iii, p. 706)

The Hindus have forgotten God, and are going the wrong way.

They worship according to the instruction of Narad.

They are blind and dumb, the blindest of the blind.

The ignorant fools take stones and worship them.

O Hindus, how shall the stone which itself sinketh carry you across?
(Macauliffe, i, p. 326)

Some fasten an idol firmly to their breasts; some say that Shiv is God;

Some say that God is in the temple of the Hindus; others believe that He is in the mosque of the Musalmans;

Some say that Ram is God; some say Krishan; some in their hearts accept the incarnations as God;

But I have forgotten all vain religion and know in my heart that the Creator is the only God. (*Macauliffe, V, p. 318*)

The world is smeared with the dirt of Ego and Duality. If one goes to wash it off at the holy places, the Impurity goes not.

(Guru Granth, p. 39; trans. by Gopal Singh, Vol. i, p. 40)

Men have performed millions of ablutions at places of pilgrimage; they have made many offerings and endured great fasts.

Putting on the dress of great penitents and wearing long hair, they have wandered in many countries, but they have not found the Beloved God.

They have made millions of attitudes of contemplation and prostrations, many offerings of their limbs to tutelary divinities, and blackened their faces;

But without meditating on the name of the Compassionate to the poor, the Deathless, they have at last gone to Death's abode.

(Macauliffe, V, p. 283)

8. Pollution

If the ideas of impurity be admitted, there is impurity in everything.

There are worms in cow-dung and in wood;

There is no grain of corn without life.

In the first place, there is life in water by which everything is made green.

How shall we avoid impurity? It falleth on our kitchens. Saith Nanak, impurity is not thus washed away: it is washed away by divine knowledge.

Impurity of the heart is greed, impurity of the tongue is falsehood;

Impurity of the eyes is gazing on another's wealth, his wife, and her beauty;

Impurity of the ears is listening to slander.

Nanak, even the pretended saint who practiseth such things, shall go bound to hell.

All impurity consisteth in superstition and attachment to worldly things. *(Macauliffe, Vol. i, pp. 242-3),*

They eat he-goats killed with unspeakable words,

And allow no one to enter their cooking squares.

Having smeared a space they draw lines around it,

And sit within, false that they are,

Saying, 'Touch not! O touch not!

'Or this food of ours will be defiled.'

But their bodies are defiled; what they do is defiled;

Their hearts are false while they perform ablutions after their meals.
(Macauliffe, Vol. i, pp. 240-1)

Ignorance is the Drummer-woman; heartlessness the But-cheress;
 Slander is the Sweepress in the heart; anger is the ChandaI.
 What use is it (O Pandit) to mark off (thy kitchen),
 When all the four Outcastes are within thee.

(Guru Granth, p. 91; trans. by Gopal Singh, Vol. i, p. 82)

“There is no impurity in songs, there is no impurity in knowledge;

There is no impurity in the moon’s or sun’s different phases;
 There is no impurity in corn, there is no impurity in ablu-tion;
 There is no impurity in rain which falleth everywhere; There is no
 impurity in earth, there is no impurity in water; There is no impurity
 contained in air;

There are no virtues, Nanak, in the man who is without a guru;

It is he impure who turneth away from God whose mouth is
(Macauliffe, i, pp. 371-2)

9. Revolutionary

If thou art Zealous of playing (the game) of Love,
 Then enter upon my Path with thy head on thy palm.
 Yea, once thou settest thy foot on this Way,
 Then find not a way out, and lay down thy head.

(Guru Granth, p. 1412, trans. by Gopal Singh, Vol. iv, p. 1337).

God is the Protector and Destroyer of the world,
 Com-compassionate to the puor, Punisher of enemies, ever the Cherisher,
 and free from Death’s noose.

(Macauliffe, V, p. 271)

God ever cherisheth the poor, saveth saints, and destroyeth
 enemies. *(Ibid. V, p. 280)*

Thou art the Discharger of arms, the Holder of the earth and the
 umbrella, the Betrayer of kings, the great Tormentor of enemies;
(Ibid. p. 283)

I bow with love and devotion to the Holy Sword.
 Assist me that I may complete this work.

.....

Thou art the Subduer of countries, the Destroyer of the armies of the

wicked, in the battle-field Thou greatly adornest the brave.

Thine arm is infrangible, Thy brightness refulgent, Thy radiance and splendour dazzle like the sun.

Thou bestowest happiness on the good, Thou terrifiest the evil, Thou scatterest sinners, I seek Thy protection.

Hail! hail to the Creator of the world, the Saviour of creation, my Cherisher, hail to Thee, O Sword !

.....

I bow to Him who holdeth the arrow in His hand; I bow to the Fearless One;

I bow to the God of gods who is in the present and the future.

I bow to the Scimitar, the two-edged Sword, the Falchion, and the Dagger.

Thou, O God, hast ever one form; Thou art ever unchan-geable.

I bow to the Holder of the mace.

Who diffused light through the fourteen worlds.

I bow to the Arrow and the Musket,

I bow to the Sword, spotless, fearless and unbreakable;

I bow to the powerful Mace and Lance

To which nothing is equal.

I bow to him who holdeth the discuss,

Who is not made of the elements and who is terrible.

I bow to him with the strong teeth;

I bow to Him who is supremely powerful,

I bow to the Arrow and the Cannon

Which destroy the enemy.

I bow to the Sword and the Rapier

Which destroy the evil.

I bow to all weapons called Shastar (which may be held).

I bow to all weapons called Astar (which may be hurled or discharged).

.....

Thou turnest men like me from blades of grass into moun-tains; than Thou there is none other cherisher of the poor.

In this Kali age and at all times there is great confidence in the powerful arm of the Sword, (*Ibid*, V, pp. 286-7)

The divine Guru sent me for religion's sake:

On this account I have come into the world-

Extend the faith everywhere;

Seize and destroy the evil and the sinful.

Understand this, ye holy men, in your souls.

I assumed birth for the purpose

Of spreading the faith, saving the saints,

And extirpating all tyrants.

AI! the first incarnations

Caused men to repeat their names.

They killed no one who had offended against God,

And they struck out no path of real religion. (*Ibid*. V, pp. 300-301)

All-death saveth all His saints;

He hath tortured and destroyed all sinners; (*Ibid*, V, p. 306)

I am the son of a brave man, not of a Brahman; how can I perform austerities?

How can I turn my attention to Thee, O Lord, and forsake domestic affairs?

Now be pleased to grant me the boon I crave with clasped hands,

That when the end of my life cometh, I may die fighting in a mighty battle.

Blest is his life in this world who repeateth God's name with his mouth and meditateth war in his heart.

The body is fleeting and shall not abide for ever; man embarking in the ship of fame shall cross the ocean of the world

Make this body a house of resignation; light thine understanding as a lamp;

Take the broom of divine knowledge into thy hand, and sweep away the filth of timidity. (*Ibid*, V, pp. 312-3)

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