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Harbans Singh

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HARBANS SINGH



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*To the memory of
my much-beloved wife
KAILASH KAUR
That loveliest of human beings*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This series of three lectures — Sikhism: The Beginnings (1469-1708), Sikhism: Challenge and Response (1849-1873) and Sikhism: The Creative Half-decade (1965-1969) — was presented at the University of California, Berkeley, in the summer of 1982. The Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi, has now offered to have it published for which I record here my sincerest thanks to it. I must express my gratitude also to Dr Mohinder Singh, Director, Guru Nanak Institute, for taking charge of the printing, and to the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, for permission for me to have this Indian edition of Lectures brought out.

HARBANS SINGH

A-1, Punjabi University Campus
Patiala
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This new, slightly revised version of the book is being brought out by Manohar Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi. To the proprietor, Mr Ajay Kumar Jain, I render my grateful acknowledgements.

HARBANS SINGH

June 25, 1993

IMPRIMIS

The recent tragic events in the Punjab have propelled Sikhism to the center of world attention. The necessity of understanding this great religious tradition, its historical beginnings, and its contemporary expressions has been placed clearly before us. But concern with Sikhism comes not just from the recent tragedies at its great center in Amritsar or from its homeland in Punjab. It comes, rather, from the continued spread of Sikhs throughout the world. In European cities, American suburbs, African villages, and Asian lands, Sikhs are to be found living out of their ancient faith with pride and confidence. The presence of these people around the world forces upon us the question of their identity, their faith, and their future. No one is better able to deal with these questions than Professor Harbans Singh. As a teacher and interpreter of the Sikh tradition and a leader of its people, Harbans Singh is uniquely qualified to tell their

story. This he has done in brief compass in the *Berkeley Lectures on Sikhism*.

This book is, in effect, a historical primer on five hundred years of Sikhism from 1469-1969. Its three chapters have from "The Beginnings" that tell the familiar story of Guru Nanak and the succession of gurus ending with Gobind Singh. The second chapter "Challenge and Response (1849-1873)" focuses on the response of Sikhism to the coming of not only the British Raj and the Christian mission but the beginnings of modernity in the homeland of the Sikhs. Chapter III "The Creative Half-decade (1965-1969)" is a focus on the unique turning point in Sikh scholarship and life that has allowed its dynamic entry into contemporary events.

The great historian of western religion, Adolf Von Harnack, once wrote that the task of the historian is to help us "overcome history by history." What Harnack meant was that as we come to know the historical sources of our life, we can overcome the limitations that our particular time and place in history leave upon us. To be aware of the history of a great religious tradition is to be freed of the distractions and limitations in which a community may find itself at a particular moment. The long view frees us from the spiritual and ethical shortcomings that beset every community of faith. What Harbans Singh has helped us to do with the great Sikh

tradition is to "overcome history by history." His vision of the origin and growth of Sikhism becomes a means for pointing us through a time of trouble to the time of promise. History is not only the story of the challenge but of the response of our communities of faith. History speaks not only of tragedy and death but of life and new beginnings. This book is witness to the hope that beyond the present is a future that comes fresh from the hand of the Eternal.

DONALD G. DAWE

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Contents

I. Sikhism: The Beginnings (1469-1708)	1
II. Sikhism: Challenge and Response (1849-1873)	37
III. Sikhism: The Creative Half-decade (1965-1969)	72

I

SIKHISM: THE BEGINNINGS (1469-1708)

This Berkeley series on Sikhism, as has been announced, is being offered in co-operation with the Sikh Center of the Pacific Coast. I perceive in the Sikh Center's participation in this programme an aptness; also, a kind of historical link. Sikhs from the Punjab started coming to North America in the closing years of the nineteenth century. They came as lumbermen, as agricultural labourers, as farmers — later even as university students. Sikhs are known for their wanderlust, for their love of adventure and their land hunger. They are a small community numerically, but, what with their ready mobility, they make good international showing. In all places, they are immediately recognizable by their turbans and beards. These are the signs of

their religious faith — an essential part of their way of life. Wherever they might be, they try to adhere to their own distinctive manner. But what to my mind is especially worth noting is the importance they attach to their religious beliefs, customs and form. Their religion is for them the strongest cementing force. It defines their character as well as their individuality. Sikh identity, I would wish to suggest, is in its profoundest meaning, religious.

First to show the way to likely immigrants into this part of the world were members of the Sikh regiments passing through Canada in 1897 on their way home from celebrations in England for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The Fraser Valley of British Columbia immediately attracted immigrants. Immigration into the United States began in 1899. In a period of three years, 1904-06, nearly 600 Indians had crossed over, most of them Sikh. With their hopes for a prosperous future, the Sikh immigrants brought with them their cultural habits and religious practices. But, with their characteristic resilience, they did not take long to adapt themselves to the new environment and to the new work style it demanded. From their loose, homespun Punjabi apparel, they easily slipped into blue dungarees and, when they returned home for visits, they walked the bazaars of their district towns turned out in their western suits, with

turbans of Japanese silk. They continued singing their Punjabi songs and reciting with a lilt snatches from the famous Punjabi romance *Hir Ranjha*, in Warris Shah's immortal verse. They continued to receive from Amritsar their Punjabi weekly and the literate among them read it out aloud to their companions. They practised their village sports such as weight-lifting and club-swinging, and exchanged uninhibitedly, in their male-bound existence, their typical Punjabi witicism and ribaldry.

At dawn, they intoned individually the *Japu*, their first daily prayer, filling the Fraser valley — and elsewhere — with harmonies modulated upon the lips of Guru Nanak himself. They set up their *diwan*-s, i.e. religious congregations and societies, and, as soon as they could, they raised their first *gurdwara* in Vancouver. Sikhs' enthusiasm for *gurdwara*-building is proverbial. Here in California, two early Sikh immigrants, Bhai Wasakha Singh and Bhai Jawala Singh, installed, at the turn of the century, Sikh Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, in their hut on their farm, near Holt. They invited Sikhs from the neighbouring districts to a congregation which constituted a committee of five from amongst themselves — Sant Teja Singh of Mastuana, now in Sangrur district of the Punjab, Sant Bhag Singh of Gujranwala, Bhai Charanjit Singh of Mastuana, Bhai Bawa Singh alias Inder

Singh of Bir Pind, in Hoshiarpur district, and Bhai Hari Singh of Ghall, in Ferozepur district — to collect funds for constructing a *gurdwara*. From money they were able to raise, a site was purchased in Stockton and a small *gurdwara* was erected in 1911, replaced by a bigger building in 1915. These are facts commonly known. Equally well known is how these Sikh emigres, largely simple peasants, turned into revolutionaries in a short brief time, ready to lead an armed revolt against the British in India. Yet they retained their religious fervour along with their radical activity. The Khalsa Diwans and Sikh *gurdwara-s* were the centres of this Ghadr revolution. Leaders in *gurdwara-s* were leaders in Ghadr. This easy commuting between the two spheres represents — remarkably — the typical Sikh pattern. It is essentially rooted in the Sikh doctrine — the affirmation in it of the opposites, the synthesis of the worldly and the otherworldly, of the temporal and the spiritual. Effectual religious devotion was made in it compatible with the ordinary duties of life.

The point comes home dramatically from the lives of these early emigres. I mentioned some moments ago the name of Bhai (later Baba) Wasakha Singh (1877-1957), a peasant from Amritsar district. He was one of the leading members of the Ghadr party here. He remained a radical all his life, but enjoyed great repute in

Sikh piety. He was named among the Panj Piare or the Five Elect, representing the mystic entity of the Khalsa Panth, to inaugurate on January 10, 1931, *kar seva*, i.e. cleansing by voluntary communal labour, of the *sarovar* or the sacred pool at Tarn Taran. He was, again, among the Five holy Sikhs who laid on October 14, 1932, the foundation of the new building for the *gurdwara* at Panja Sahib, in northwestern Punjab. In 1934, he was named Jathedar or Provost of Sri Akal Takht at Amritsar, Sikhs' highest seat of religious authority. He was drawn towards leftist ideology, but remained a practising Sikh, reciting regularly his *nitnem* or daily regimen of five prayers. Baba Jawala Singh (1866-1938) was one of the founders of the movement for the establishment of Sikh temple at Stockton and of the Guru Nanak Educational Society here. He was vice-president of the California branch of the Hindi Association in 1914. He spent 18 years in Indian gaols as a Ghadr revolutionary and another year as a leader of the Punjab Kisan Sabha, a leftist organization.

Bhai Nidhan Singh (1851-1936) of Chuggha, a village in Ferozepur district, was a member of the executive of the Ghadr party as well as president of the newly established Khalsa Diwan Society at Stockton. He returned to India and set up secret factories at Jhabewal and Lohatbaddi,

in Ludhiana district, for making bombs with the object of raiding the British regimental magazine at Ferozepur. He was arrested (April 19, 1915), disguised as a wandering mendicant. He was awarded death sentence which was later commuted to transportation for life. He remained in gaol for 15 years. He was a deeply religious person and such was the esteem he enjoyed in the Sikh community that he was included among the Five Elect to lay the cornerstone of the new building for the *gurdwara* at Panja Sahib. He was president of Gurdwara Singh Sabha at Moga, in Ferozepur district, and died in fact in its premises on December 6, 1936.

Balwant Singh Canadian (1882-1917), a native of Khurdpur, near Jullundur, served the *gurdwara* at Vancouver as a Granthi or custodian and Scripture-reader. For his revolutionary activities, he was hanged in the Central gaol at Lahore on May 30, 1917. Udham Singh (1882-1926), a member of the Ghadr party, was appointed to impart military training to the Ghadr cadre. He was tried in the first Lahore conspiracy case and was sentenced to transportation for life. In 1921, he escaped from gaol and, after many a hair-raising adventure, reached Punjab from where he smuggled himself out to Kabul. There he set up a Sikh society, Khalsa Diwan, and sought the Afghan King's permission for Sikhs to assemble in religious congrega-

tion at Gurdwara Chashma Sahib, sacred to Guru Nanak, near Jalalabad. From Kabul he used to come to Amritsar incognito on religious festival occasions. Bhai Randhir Singh (1878-1961) never crossed the Indian shores, but spent many long years in British gaols for his involvement in the revolutionary movement. He was, as is commonly known, widely revered among the Sikhs as a saint of high sanctity. He has written mystical poetry as well as philosophical treatises on Sikhism.

During the Akali movement in the Punjab in early twenties for the liberation of Sikh shrines from the control of an effete priestly order, arose an extremist group known as Babar Akalis. Their main object was *sudhar* (reformation) — a euphemism for liquidation — of *jholichuk-s* (literally, robe-bearers, i.e. British stooges and informers). The first duty of the members under the rules of this secret organization was to recite *gurbani* as part of their daily devotion.

Discernible in these instances is the distinctive Sikh motif — a motif bequeathed to the Sikhs by their religious teaching and tradition. In the revolutionary struggle in which they remained engaged for most of the eighteenth century, their one principal object, as they were forced to seek safety in remote hills and jungles, used to be to have a glimpse of the Harimandir, Golden Temple of modern day, and to have a dip in the holy tank

around it. Many risked their lives for this. The common meeting-place for Ghadr revolutionaries here in the twentieth century used to be the *gurdwara-s*.

In the Sikh Center's co-operation with the University of California in setting up this series, I see the same urge on the part of Sikh immigrants to reaffirm their affinity with their religious tradition. I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Center. The Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies deserves congratulations for sponsoring this lecture series on Sikhism. I must also express my gratitude to the Department for inviting me to give the lectures this year.

The beginnings of the Sikh faith go back to the revelation brought to light by Guru Nanak. In the message he delivered lay the seed of a vital thought stream which moulded a new community of men. Attempts have been made to split Guru Nanak's doctrine into various strands and to trace their origin to precedent schools of thought. But to understand Guru Nanak fully, we have to look at the totality of his tenet and at what impact it made on history. In this perspective, we shall see that Guru Nanak is historically the founder of the Sikh faith. His precept was definitively the starting-point. In many significant ways it signalled a critical departure in contemporary religious ethos. Sikh tradition in

continuum bears witness to the individual quality of Guru Nanak's intuition. A modern Muslim scholar, Professor M. Mujeeb, has very aptly seized upon this point. Rejecting the theory that Guru Nanak's monotheism was the result of Muslim influence, he says:

The revelation that came to Guru Nanak must have been as direct and immediate and as independent of history and social circumstances as the religious records of the Sikhs show it to be.¹

Guru Nanak was born in A.D. 1469 at Talwandi Rai Bhoie, now known as Nankana Sahib, 60 km southwest of Lahore. Bahlol Lodi held at that time the throne of Delhi. His nobleman, Tatar Khan, was the governor of Lahore. Guru Nanak's father, Kalyan Chand (shortened by the biographers to Kalu), belonged to the Bedi clan of the Kshatriyas. According to the *janamsakhi*-s, traditional accounts in Punjabi of Guru Nanak's life, prodigies attended the illustrious event. "Light flashed across the mud-built room in which the birth

1 M. Mujeeb, "Guru Nanak's Religion, Islam and Sikhism," in Gurmukh Nihal Singh (ed.), *Guru Nanak: His Life, Times and Teachings* (New Delhi: Guru Nanak Foundation), p. 116.

took place." The family priest, who came to cast the child's horoscope, told the father that his son would sit under canopy. He further spoke: "Both Hindus and Muslims will pay him reverence. His name will become current on earth and in heaven. The ocean will give him way. So will the earth and the skies. He will worship and acknowledge but One Formless Lord and teach others to do so. Every creature he will consider as God's own creation." Guru Nanak grew up in his ancestral village and those early years of his life are described in the *janamsakhi-s* in a variety of parable, legend and miracle. On one point those early biographers are unanimous. They state that Guru Nanak was the favourite of both Hindus and Muslims in the village.

Seeing that Nanak did not take to any useful calling in life, his father sent him to Sultanpur where lived his daughter, Nanaki, and her husband, Jai Ram. At Sultanpur, Guru Nanak was put to work in the local Lodi chief's *modikhana* or stores. There he also got married and had two sons. At the age of twenty-eight, he left Sultanpur to embark on his long preaching tours, called *udasian* in the Sikh tradition. This was preceded by what the *janamsakhi-s* narrate as a direct mystical encounter. The first words he uttered after three days of silent communion were: "There is no Hindu, there is no Musalman." This was a simple announcement, and yet a

significant one in the context of India of his day. To a society torn by conflict, he brought a vision of common humanity — a vision which transcended all barriers of creed and caste, race and country. He reminded men of their essential oneness. The terms, 'Hindu' and 'Musalman' included Jainas, Buddhists, and others. Guru Nanak was asking men of all faiths and denominations to look beyond external divisions and distinctions to the fundamental unity of mankind.

In proclaiming the unity which lay beyond particularisms, Guru Nanak was not overruling any existing religious designation or tradition. His intention was more radical: he wanted to point men beyond their accepted condition to a new possibility — a human community with a true spirit of fellowship and justice, with that deep ethical and spiritual commitment which expresses itself in concern for fellowmen. Nor was he seeking a syncretistic union between Hinduism and Islam or striving to achieve in his teaching a judicious mixture of elements from both to be acceptable to all. His equal attention to Hindu and Muslim identities and use of some of their religious vocabulary have led some to depict him as the reconciler of the two faiths, and to see Sikhism as "a deliberate mingling of Hindu and Muslim practice." To do so will mean missing much of his individual genius and

misinterpreting the historical development issuing from his revelation.

Accompanied by a Muslim follower, named Mardana, Guru Nanak set out on his travels which took him to all four corners of India and beyond. From Assam in the east to Mecca and Baghdad in the west, he travelled arduously for twenty-four years spreading through his poetic utterance and straightforward example his message of love, faith and equality.

Some of these notes were already audible in the milieu in which Guru Nanak was born. The esoteric and mystical sects of that time — the Nathapanthis, the Sahajayanis, the Kapalikas and others — stressed the importance of inner experience. They rejected the Brahmanical system. They rejected caste, the authority of the ancient texts and the Sanskrit language. The Bhaktas and the Sufis preached a religion of devotion. They deprecated the outward masks of sanctity and the corseted rigidity of form and ritualism. The Nirguna Sampradaya saints — Namdev, Kabir and Ravidas — represented in their teaching and way of life a synthesis of cultic mysticism and Bhakti and Sufism. All this was part of Guru Nanak's inheritance. Yet he belonged to none of these systems or orders. Nor could he aptly be placed in the framework of any of these. Attempts at tracing kinship between him and Bhakti reformers and the description of

Kabir, from among them, as the “forerunner of Sikhism” will be equally misleading. There is no evidence to prove that Guru Nanak and Kabir had ever met or that the former owed anything to the latter’s teachings. Kabir’s compositions figure in the Goindval *pothi*-s, anthologies of hymns of the Gurus and some of the Bhaktas prepared in the time of Guru Amar Das, Nanak III. They are included in the Guru Granth Sahib as well. But this happened much later when Guru Arjun, fifth in the spiritual line from the Founder, compiled the Holy Book. Besides his own compositions and those of his four predecessors, he entered in the Holy Book hymns of a number of medieval saints and mystics, both Hindu and Muslim. Kabir was one of them.

Guru Nanak’s doctrine was strictly monotheistic. He taught the oneness of God. He called the Supreme Being simply *Ik* (One), without a second, Who is eternal, infinite and all-pervasive. He is not limited by time. He is perennially self-existent and is the source of love and grace. In sublime Punjabi poetry, Guru Nanak has sung praises of God as defined in “Mul Mantra,” the preamble to his *Japu*, the Sikhs’ morning prayer. God is One; what He has created has reality. He responds to the devotion of His humblest follower. He is both *nirguna* and *saguna*, i.e. He is with attributes as well as without attributes. He is formless. He is never

incarnated, nor can any image contain Him.

This affirmation of Reality, the ultimate ground of all that exists, was the central value in Guru Nanak's teaching. The main quest was for *mukti* or release. Loving devotion was set forth as the truest virtue — the fundamental disposition for one seeking liberation. By immersing oneself in *nam*, i.e. by constant remembrance of the Divine Name, one attained *moksha* or *mukti*. This was freedom from ego and self-bondage — from the circuit of birth, death and rebirth. Life in this world was conditioned. Temporality was an essential trait of human existence. Yet one could go beyond this contingent state, could transcend *samsara*, the sphere of temporality, the finite world of becoming, by concentrating on God's Name.

What are the causes of man's bondage? The primary one is his egoism (*haumai*). This is what separates man from the Primal Reality and dims the divine spark within him. This is what hampers human understanding. Egoism or self-concern creates a wall around the individual and separates him from his original source. This leads to spiritual blindness or nescience (*agian, ajnana*). One becomes alienated from the Universal Will and mistakes what is unreal, the *samsara*, for the real. One is ruled by one's passions and instincts and cannot break loose from the stranglehold of the five

evils; *kama* (sensuality), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (avarice), *moha* (attachment) and *ahankara* (pride). Egoity runs counter to divinity. The ego-ridden person is the *manmukh*, unregenerate man, self-centred and self-willed, who is led by his wavering mind. *Haumai* is the cause of all suffering. By overcoming *haumai* is the truth realized. This is the way to achieve union with the Eternal One. Attainment of union with the Eternal One is the ultimate purpose of man. This, according to Guru Nanak, is *mukti*, final release or liberation. Thus is the cycle of death and birth broken.

How can *haumai*, the finite ego or self-love, be overcome? Guru Nanak has prescribed no austerities or penances. He in fact rejected all outward forms of piety. He said that pilgrimages, fasts and ascetic practices were of no avail. The first step towards enlightenment is the apprehension that the Transcendent is the only ultimate truth. This apprehension must be accompanied by the love of God, utter self-surrender to Him and complete faith in His *hukm* or Will. Thus one realizes the Reality and frees oneself from the bondage of ego.

Integral, simultaneously, to Guru Nanak's intuition were an awareness of the ills and errors of society and his concern to remedy these. This was in contrast to the spirit of escape which dominated contemporary religious disposition.

Although the body is subject to destruction, it is not to be disregarded. It is the shrine of the indwelling spirit. Guru Nanak said, "The body is the palace, the temple, the house of God. Into it He hath put His light eternal." The body is to be used as an instrument of spiritual gain and service to mankind. Human life gives an individual the opportunity to do good to others. A religious man should not withdraw himself from the world. "He should," says Guru Nanak, "battle in the open field. His mind should be perfectly in control and his heart filled with love."

The man of Guru Nanak's vision is the creation of God and he partakes of His Own Light. Since man is of Divine lineage, he essentially is good, not evil. Evil, according to Sikhism, is not something inbuilt in the human situation. It arises out of man's ignorance of his Divine origin, out of his *haumai*. In this world which in Sikhism is posited as a reality, being "the True One's Own mansion," man launches upon the rediscovery of his true self. This invests his sojourn in the world with authenticity and reality. That is why the Sikh faith admits man's material happiness to be as important as his spiritual liberation. Man's secular and mundane concerns are not rejected, but are sought to be related to a higher spiritual and moral goal. The persistent opposition in Guru Nanak's

thought to oppressive State structures and to empty ritualism is derived from the recognition of their anti-human character.

Guru Nanak attaches the greatest importance to moral conduct. His composition, the *Japu*, elucidates the ethical system he envisioned. Sikhs recall these teachings daily as they recite their morning prayer. Perseverance, chastity, wisdom, self-control, patience and obedience to the Will of God are the virtues prized most. Practical virtue was thus made an essential ingredient of piety. Orthopraxy (right-doing) was considered as important as orthodoxy (right-thinking). Guru Nanak says, "Truth is higher than all else, but higher by far is the living by truth."

Guru Nanak laid special emphasis on *seva*, or self-abnegating deeds of service. By humble and devoted service one purified one's body and mind. This was the way of a truly religious man. He must live in the world and be an active agent in promoting the welfare of the community. He should have goodwill towards all and should be ready to render service to others. *Kirat karni, vand chhakna, te nam japna* — this is the duty of every true disciple. He must earn his living by his own labour, share with others the fruit of his exertion and practise the discipline of *nam* (i.e. absorption in God's remembrance). This is the essence of Guru Nanak's teaching.

Guru Nanak was a teacher not of his own wisdom. He preached what, he said, had been taught by the Lord Himself. In his *bani* or inspired word, he spoke as a witness to revelation. He had seen or heard something of God to which he called the attention of men. In one of his verses, he said, "As the Lord sends the word so do I deliver it." Again, "I speak only what Thou made me to speak." Thus Guru Nanak found himself to be performing a duty divinely laid upon him.

At the end of his tours, Guru Nanak settled at Kartarpur, a habitation he had himself founded on the right bank of the River Ravi. There a community of disciples grew around him. It was not a monastic order, but a fellowship of ordinary men engaged in ordinary occupations of life. An institution of far-reaching importance was the *langar* or community refectory where all sat together to share a common repast, overruling distinctions of caste and creed. A key element in this process of restructuring of religious and social life was the spirit of *seva* or self-giving service. Corporal works of charity and mutual help were undertaken voluntarily and zealously and considered a peculiarly pious duty.

The society thus taking shape was the precursor of historical Sikhism. Its main inspiration was supplied by Guru Nanak. He deter-

mined its principal truths and doctrines. In his lifetime, it had acquired certain institutional features — the *sangat*, i.e. holy fellowship or community, the *dharamsal* and the *langar*. It had the Guru's word bequeathed to it through his *bani* or revealed utterance. It had its own script — Gurmukhi — in which the *bani* was recorded and its own style in which to sing it. Its constituents were simple men — farmers, artisans, traders and those from what were considered the lower professions — who, forswearing their previous allegiances, had accepted Guru Nanak as their teacher. Caste, icon-worship and empty ritual were its common rejections. Its mainstay was fervent faith in the Divine, truly ethical practice and a full acceptance of life. Its ideals of fraternity and *seva* and its concern with day-to-day affairs were elements which defined the course of its future evolution.

Guru Nanak's spiritual message expressed itself concretely in these institutional symbols. *Dharamsal*, in Sanskrit *dharamshala* meaning a court of justice, tribunal or charitable asylum, was the place where Sikhs gathered in the name of Akal, the Timeless Lord, to pray and to sing Guru Nanak's hymns. The term also began to be used metaphorically. In the *Japu*, for instance, Guru Nanak described the earth as a *dharamsal*, i.e. the field for virtuous action. Likewise, human body was the *dharamsal*— an arena for

good, pious deeds. As a place of worship, the first *dharamsal* was, according to the *Puratan Janamsakhi*, established at Talumba, now in Multan district of Pakistan, where Guru Nanak had reformed a thug by the name of Sajjan. *Dharamsal*-s were established in many distant places in the wake of Guru Nanak's extensive peregrinations. That they had become fairly widespread is borne out by the testimony of Bhai Gurdas (1551-1636), contemporary with the Fifth Guru, Guru Arjun, who is much revered in Sikh learning and piety. Writing about how widely Guru Nanak's message had spread, he said in his poetic style in stanza 27 of his *Var I* that faith was restored to the householder, "and every home has become a *dharamsal* where prayer and adoration are practised." About the *dharamsal* instituted by Guru Nanak at Kartarpur, Bhai Gurdas says, "*dharamsal kartarpur sadhsangati sach khand vasai*" (*Var XXIV. 1*), i.e. in establishing the *dharamsal* at Kartarpur, with its holy fellowship, Guru Nanak brought the heaven on earth. These *dharamsals* played an important role in the growth of the Sikh community. *Dharamsal* eventually became the *gurdwara*, lit. the Guru's door or house. This is the word now-a-days used for Sikh places of worship. The term came into general use after Sikh Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, was proclaimed Guru by Guru Gobind

Singh. *Gurdwara* is the Sikh holy place where the Guru Granth Sahib is seated.

Sangat, originally from Sanskrit *sangati*, meaning union, association or company, is the word used for Sikhs gathered for prayer or religious ceremony. It had a social implication as well; it united the Sikhs in a particular locality or region into a brotherhood or fraternity. A member of the *sangat*, i.e. every Sikh, was known as *bhai*, lit. brother, signifying one of holy living. The *sangat* brought together men not only in spiritual pursuit but also in worldly affairs, forging community of purpose as well as of action based on mutual equality and brotherhood. Though *sangat*-s were spread over widely separated localities, they formed a single entity owing loyalty to the word of Guru Nanak. *Sangat*-s were thus the Sikh community in formation.

In these *sangat*-s the disciples mixed together without considerations of caste or status. Bhai Gurdas, in his *Var* XI, mentions the names of the leading Sikhs of the time of Guru Nanak and his five spiritual successors. In the first 12 stanzas of this *Var*, he describes the characteristics of a *gursikh* or follower of the Gurus. In the succeeding stanzas, occur the names of some of the prominent Sikhs, in many cases with caste, class or profession of the individual. In some instances, even places they came from are men-

tioned. Bhai Gurdas' *Var X* thus provides interesting clues to the composition, socially, of early Sikhism and its spread, geographically. Out of the 19 disciples of Guru Nanak mentioned by Bhai Gurdas, two were Muslims — Mardana, a *mirasi* or bard from his own village, and Daulat Khan Lodi, an Afghan noble. Bura, celebrated as Bhai Buddha who was contemporary with the first six Gurus, was a Jatt of Randhava subcaste. So was Ajitta, of Pakkhole Randhava, in present-day Gurdaspur district of the Punjab. Phirna was a Khaihra Jatt; Malo and Manga were musicians; and Bhagirath, formerly a worshipper of the goddess Kali, was the *chaudhari*, i.e. revenue official of Malsihan, in Lahore district. Of the several Khatri disciples, Mula was from Kir subcaste, Pritha and Khera were Soinis, Prithi Mal was a Sahigal, Bhagta was an Ohri, Japu a Vansi, and Sihan and Gajjan, cousins, were Uppals. The Sikh *sangat* was thus the melting-pot for the high and the low, the twice-born and the outcaste. It was a new fraternity emerging as the participants' response of discipleship to the Guru.

Sangat-s were knit into an organized system by Guru Amar Das who established *manji*-s or preaching districts, each comprising a number of *sangat*-s. Guru Arjun appointed *masand*-s or local leaders, to look after *sangat*-s in different regions and to link them to their principal

spiritual seat. *Sangat* was the precursor to the Khalsa formed by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. That was the highest point in the evolution of the casteless Sikh commonwealth originating in the institution of *sangat*. Along with the *sangat* developed the institution of *langar*, or more properly *Guru ka Langar*. *Langar*, a Persian word, means an almshouse, an asylum for the poor and the destitute or a public kitchen kept by a great man for his followers and dependents. Some Sufi *khanqah*-s ran *langar*-s or kitchens. In the Sikh tradition, *langar* became an integral part of Sikh communal life. A Sikh place of worship must have a *langar* attached to it. The origins go back to the time of Guru Nanak himself. He instituted the *langar* and made it into a dynamic instrument for social regeneration. From an almshouse or asylum, it turned into a centre of positive and active brotherhood where all contributed the labour of their hands and sat together in a *pangat*, or row, to eat. It trained people in *seva* and served as a means of emphasizing the unity and equality of humankind.

Langar was another important factor in the consolidation of the Sikh community. Every succeeding Guru nurtured and strengthened the institution. In the time of Guru Angad, for instance, *Guru ka Langar* was known for the rich variety of its victuals. Sikh texts record that the

Guru's wife, Mata Khivi — providing shade or comfort to everyone “like a thickly leaved tree” — lovingly supervised the *langar*. In the days of Guru Amar Das, the maxim became prevalent: *pahile pangat pachhe sangat* — “eating together takes precedence of meeting together.” He expected all his visitors to partake of food with others in the *langar* before seeing him. According to Sikh chroniclers, even Emperor Akbar, who once visited the Guru at Goindval, had to eat out of the common kitchen like any other pilgrim. *Langar*, together with *sangat*, helped to establish a positive equalitarian tradition among the Sikhs.

A community unfragmented by caste or status had grown around Guru Nanak. *Dharamsal*, *sangat* and *langar* were its typical institutions. Work, worship and mutual sharing symbolized the essential features of the Sikh concept of life evolving through them. *Bani*, the Gurus' utterance of divine truth, was the source of moral and spiritual instruction. It was recited with love and reverence by the faithful. They learnt it by heart or recorded it in the newly introduced Gurmukhi characters. This *bani* was the foundation of the Guru Granth Sahib which later became the central focus in Sikh life and tradition.

Marks of self-identity had thus been established in Guru Nanak's own time. A decisive step

towards further crystallization was taken when he nominated a successor to carry on his work. This fact of the nomination of a successor was an indication of how Guru Nanak had visualized an enduring system. It was crucial as well for the continuance of his teaching. The character of the succession was as important and typical as was the act of nomination. The successor was chosen from amongst the disciples. He had become worthy of the dignity by completely abandoning himself to the will of the Guru. By humility and service he had gained perfect spiritual insight. Guru Nanak made him more than his successor; he made him equal with himself. He transferred his own light to him. The successor's name was Lahina. Guru Nanak called him "Angad," a limb of his own body or part of himself. Angad became Nanak himself, Nanak II. As Bhai Gurdas, not long afterwards, wrote:

Angad got the same *tilak* [i.e. mark on the forehead], the same canopy over his head,
And he was seated on the same throne
As belonged to Guru Nanak.
The seal from Guru Nanak's hand
Came into Guru Angad's,
And thus was his sovereignty proclaimed.

This process was repeated successively until the time of the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Light passed from body to body. The image in the Sikh tradition describes it as one flame being lit from the other. Sikhism thus owns ten Gurus who were one in spirit, though different in body. They shared the same light and revealed the same truth. Their message was the same. To this day they are revered equally by the faithful. This phenomenon of the ten Gurus or teachers of equal spiritual rank and sharing the same revelation is peculiar to Sikhism.

In the Sikh system, the word *Guru* is used only for the ten spiritual prophets — Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, and for none other. Now this office of Guru is fulfilled by the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sacred Book, which was so apotheosized by the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, before he passed away in 1708. No living person, however, holy or revered, can have the title or status of Guru. For Sikhs, Guru is the holy teacher, the prophet under direct commission from God — the Ten who have been and the Guru Granth which is their continuing visible manifestation.

Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), the last of the Gurus, created the martial order of the Khalsa. This was done dramatically at Anandpur, in the Sivalik hills, on March 30, 1699. The five Sikhs who offered their heads at Guru Gobind

Singh's call were initiated as the first five members of the Khalsa, God's Elect. These Panj Piare, or the Five Beloved, as they were called — three of them from among the so-called Shudras, the fourth a Kshatriya and fifth a Jatt — formed the nucleus of the self-abnegating, martial and casteless Khalsa commonwealth Guru Gobind Singh had brought into being. They were each given the surname of *Singh*, meaning lion, and were ever to wear the five emblems of the Khalsa— *kesa* (unshorn hair), *kangha* (a comb in the hair to keep them tidy as against the recluses who kept them matted in token of their having renounced the world), *kara* (a steel bracelet), *kachh* (short breeches) and *kirpan* (a sword). They were enjoined to succour the helpless and fight the oppressor, to have faith in One God and to consider all human beings equal, irrespective of caste and belief.

Another permanent feature supplied by Guru Gobind Singh was the Holy Scripture proclaimed Guru. A day before he died, he asked for the Sacred Volume to be brought forth. To quote the *Bhatt Vahi Bhadson Thanesar*:

*Guru Gobind Singh Mahall dasman beta
Guru Tegh Bahadur ka pota Guru
Hargobindji ka parpota Guru Arjunji ka
bans Guru Ram Dasji ki Surajbansi Gosal
gotra Sodhi Khatri basi Anandpur parganah.*

*Kahlur muqam Nanded tat Godavari des
dakkhan sammat satran sai painsath
Kartik mas ki chauth shukla pakkhe
budhwar ke dihun Bhai Daya Singh se
bachan hoya Sri Granth Sahib lai ao bachan
pai Daya Singh Sri Granth Sahib lai aye
Guruji ne panch paise narial age bheta
rakha matha teka, sarbatt sangat se kaha
mera hukm hai meri jagah Sri Granthji ko
janana jo Sikh janega tis ki ghal thaen
paegi Guru tis ki bahuri karega sat kar
manana.*

Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master, son of Guru Tegh Bahadur, grandson of Guru Hargobind, great-grandson of Guru Arjun, of the family of Guru Ram Das, Surajbansi Gosal clan, Sodhi Khatri, resident of Anandpur, *parganah* Kahlur, now at Nanded, on the Godavari bank, in the Deccan, asked Bhai Daya Singh, on Wednesday, *shukla pakkh* chauth of the month of Katik, 1765^{Bk} [October 6, 1708], to fetch Sri Granth Sahib. The Guru placed before it five pice and a coconut and bowed his head to it. He said to the *sangat*, "It is my commandment: Own Sri Granthji in my place. He who so acknowledges it will obtain his reward. The Guru will rescue him. Know this as the truth.

According to Giani Garja Singh, who discovered this entry, the author was Narbud Singh

Bhatt, who was with Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded at that time.

Bhatt Vahis are a new source of information discovered by Giani Garja Singh (1904-77), a dogged searcher for materials on Sikh history. The Bhattas were hereditary panegyrists, genealogists or family bards. (A group of them were introduced to Guru Arjun by Bhatt Bhikkha who himself had become a disciple in the time of Guru Amar Das. According to Bhai Gurdas, *Var XI.21*, and Bhai Mani Singh, *Sikkhan di Bhagatmala*, he had earlier visited Guru Arjun with the *sangat* of Sultanpur Lodi.) Several of them came into the Sikh fold. A few composed hymns in honour of the Gurus which were entered in the Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjun.

These Bhattas also recorded events of the lives of the Gurus and of the members of their families in their scrolls called *vahi-s*. These *vahi-s* are preserved to this day in the descendant families, especially at the village of Karsindhu, in Jind district of Haryana. The script in which they are written is called *bhatakshri* — a kind of family code like *lande* and *mahajani*. The only known scholar to have worked with these materials was Giani Garja Singh. Some of the notes he took down were used in *Shahid Bilas Bhai Mani Singh* he edited and published in 1961. Punjabi transcripts he made of some of the Bhatt Vahi

entries pertaining to the lives of the Gurus — Guru Hargobind to Guru Gobind Singh — are preserved in the Department of Punjab Historical Studies at the Punjabi University at Patiala. Further work, further research is clearly needed to compare these notes with the original entries. This unusual source has in fact to be explored *de novo*. One does not know what gems lie hidden there. Time is taking toll of these documents and their custodians are drifting into other professions. I know of a Bhatt family which has branched off into catering. Younger members have lost familiarity with the script. A studious and minute investigation of this source may bring to light many new facts and help resolve several of the problems of Sikh history of that period. Its importance from the sociological standpoint will also be immense. But no serious study has so far been undertaken. All we have are the notes or transcripts prepared by Garja Singh.

Apart from this new testimony culled by Giani Garja Singh from the Bhatt Vahis, other old Sikh documents also attest the fact of succession having been passed on by Guru Gobind Singh to the Guru Granth Sahib. For instance, the *Rahitnama* by Bhai Nand Lal, one of Guru Gobind Singh's disciples remembered to this day for his splendid Persian poetry in honour of the Gurus. In his *Rahitnama*, or code of con-

duct, Bhai Nand Lal, who was at Nanded in the camp of Emperor Bahadur Shah as one of his ministers at the time of Guru Gobind Singh's death, thus records his last words in his Punjabi verse:

He who would wish to see the Guru,
Let him come and see the Granth...
He who would wish to speak with him,
Let him read and reflect upon what says
the Granth.
He who would wish to hear his word,
He should with all his heart read the
Granth, or listen to the Granth being
read.

Another of Guru Gobind Singh's disciples and associates, Bhai Prahlaad Singh, records in his *Rahitnama*, the Guru's commandment:

By the word of the Timeless One
Has the Khalsa been manifested.
This is my commandment for all of my
Sikhs;
Thou shalt acknowledge Granth as the
Guru.

In *Gur Bilas Patshahi 10* (author, Kuir Singh; the year of writing, 1751), Guru Gobind Singh is quoted as saying:

This is no more the age for a personal Guru
to be anointed.

I shall not place the mark on anyone's
forehead.

All *sangat* is owned as Khalsa now, under
the shelter of the Almighty Himself.

They are now to the Word attached.

He who believes is the Sikh par excellence.

Upon the Guru Granth should he put his
reliance...

To none else should he direct his adora-
tion,

All his wishes the Guru will bring to
fulfilment,

This he must believe,

Casting away all dubiety.

I have laboured this point somewhat lengthily for the reason that cavil is occasionally raised. Certain cults among Sikhs still owning personal Gurus ask for authority to be quoted corroborating the statement that Guru Gobind Singh had indeed named the Guru Granth Sahib his successor. No archival testimony can be presented, unless the Bhatt Vahi entry be included in that category. But evidence bequeathed through tradition — written as well as oral—explicitly supports this fact. This is what has come down the generations through Sikh

memory. Had there been the 11th, 12th, Gurus, the names could not have been effaced from the pages of history. Guru Gobind Singh brought to an end the line of personal Gurus and declared the Holy Word Guru after him.

Along with the Guru Granth, the Khalsa was now the person visible of the Guru. The word *khalsa* is derived from the Arabic *khalis*, meaning pure or pious. Guru Gobind Singh used the term in its symbolic and technical sense. In official terminology, *khalsa* in Mughal days meant lands or territory directly under the king. Crown-land was known as *khalsa* land. As says a contemporary poet named Bhai Gurdas II, Guru Gobind Singh had converted the *sangat* into Khalsa. Sikhs were the Guru's Khalsa, i.e. directly his own, without any intermediaries. On that point, we have the evidence of *Sri Gur Sobha* by Sainapat, a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh, and Guru Gobind Singh's own *hukamnama*-s. To quote from the former:

A day preceding the event [i.e. the passing
of Guru Gobind Singh],
The Sikhs gathered together
And began to ask:
"What body will the lord now take?"

The Guru at that moment spoke in this
way:

“In the Khalsa wilt thou see me,
“With the Khalsa is my sole concern,
“My physical form have I bestowed upon
the Khalsa.”

Guru Gobind Singh, in his *hukamnama* issued on Phagun 4, 1756^{Bk}/February 1, 1700, to the *sangat* of Pattan Farid, modern Pakpattan, refers to the *sangat* as “his own Khalsa.” *Hukamnama*-s are letters issued by the Gurus to *sangat*-s in different parts of the country. Some of them have been traced in recent years and two collections were published in 1967 — one by Dr Ganda Singh (Punjabi University, Patiala) and the second by Shamsher Singh Ashok (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar). Most of the *hukamnama*-s are common to the two anthologies. These *hukamnama*-s are another valuable source of information on the lives of the Gurus and on the Sikh communities forming in far-flung places.

That the Guru Granth Sahib is Guru Eternal for it has been the understanding and conviction of the Sikh Panth since the passing away of Guru Gobind Singh. In their hard, exilic days soon afterwards when they were outlawed and had to seek the safety of the hills and jungles, the Sikhs' most precious possession which they cherished and defended at the cost of their lives was the Guru Granth Sahib. The Holy Book was their

sole religious reference, and they acknowledged none other. In the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who established sovereignty in the name of the Khalsa, personal devotion and court ceremonial centred around the Guru Granth Sahib. As contemporary records testify, Ranjit Singh began his day by making obeisance to the Guru Granth. On festive occasions, he made pilgrimage to Amritsar to bow before the Guru Granth in the Harimandir. For the Sikhs in general, Guru Granth Sahib was the only focus of religious attachment. None other existed otherwise, in either human form or symbolically. In the Sikh literature after Guru Gobind Singh, the Holy Book is commonly referred to as *Guru Granth*.

The personal Guruship was ended by Guru Gobind Singh himself. Succession passed to the Guru Granth Sahib in perpetuity. This was a most significant development in the history of the community. The finality of the Holy Book was a fact rich in religious and social implications. The Guru Granth Sahib became Guru and received Divine honours. The Book was owned as the medium of the revelation descended through the Gurus. It was for Sikhs the perpetual authority, spiritual as well as historical. They lived their religion in response to it. Through it, they were able to observe their faith more fully, more vividly. It was central to all that

subsequently happened in Sikh life. It was the source of their verbal tradition and it shaped their intellectual and cultural environment. From it the community's ideals, institutions and rituals derived their meaning. Its role in ensuring the community's integration and permanence and in determining the course of its history has been crucial.

The Word enshrined in the Holy Book was always revered by the Gurus as well as by their disciples as of Divine origin. The Guru was the revealer of the Word. One day the Word was to take the place of the Guru. The line of personal Gurus could not have continued forever. The inevitable came to pass when Guru Gobind Singh declared Granth Sahib to be his successor. It was only through the Word that the Guruship could be made everlasting. This object Guru Gobind Singh secured when he pronounced the Holy Granth to be the Guru after him. The Guru Granth was henceforth, and for all time to come, the Guru for the Sikhs.

II

SIKHISM: CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE (1849-1873)

Beginning as a spiritual, monotheistic and ethical faith with the revelation of Guru Nanak, Sikhism gradually developed into a cohesive and well-marked order, with a pronouncedly social outlook. Within half a century of Guru Gobind Singh's passing away, it had turned into a political force. In another 40 years, it had become a State. The process was accelerated by the political situation it confronted and the persecution it had to endure. The Sikh leader who presaged a troublous century's daring chain of events was Banda Singh Bahadur (1670-1716), who had received the rites of Khalsa initiation at the hands of Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded, in the Deccan, in 1708. He came to the north carrying a drum, a banner and five arrows

the Guru had bestowed upon him. As he entered the Punjab, he started seizing territory. On May 14, 1710, the important town of Sirhind was occupied. Banda Singh assumed the style of royalty and struck coin in the name of Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh. He thus laid the foundation of Sikh sovereignty in the Punjab. Rendered into English, the Persian inscription on his coin read:

By the grace of the True Lord is struck the
coin in the two worlds;
The sword of Nanak is the granter of all
boons,
And the victory is of Guru Gobind Singh,
the King of Kings.

Banda Singh's rule, though short-lived, had a far-reaching impact on the history of the Punjab. With it began the decay of Mughal authority and of the feudal system of society it had created. Banda Singh abolished the zamindari system in the territories under him and made the tillers masters of the lands by conferring upon them proprietary rights. This marked a major change in the social order in the Punjab and led to the emergence of peasants as a potent force in the political life of northern India.

The Mughal authority retaliated with sever-

ity. Banda Singh was captured and executed in Delhi on June 9, 1716. The persecution became fiercer and prohibitory laws against the Sikhs were enforced with added vigour. That was a time of trial and suffering — of grim challenge. But this is not my theme today. The challenge I refer to is the one Sikhs faced after the annexation to British dominions in India of the State they had carved out. They had survived the persecution and risen up to establish their sway in the Punjab. How the Sikh Sardars set their seal of authority on the territories they acquired is graphically described by their British historian, Joseph Davey Cunningham, in his *A History of the Sikhs* (1849). "Riding day and night," says he, "each horseman would throw his belt and scabbard, his articles of dress and accoutrement, until he was almost naked, into successive villages to mark them as his." These acquisitions were then recorded in the *misl*-s or papers of each Sardar at the Akal Takht at Amritsar. Twelve Sikh independencies, called *misl*-s, thus came into being. From among these principalities Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) created the powerful state of the Khalsa. Born heir to one of these confederacies, he had the foresight to visualize a united Sikh power. By his superior military skill and political acumen, he succeeded in consolidating Sikh territories north of the River Sutlej and in joining the people of the

Punjab into a strong nation. He occupied Lahore on July 7, 1799, and later took the far-flung provinces of Multan, Kashmir and Peshawar.

The kingdom Maharaja Ranjit Singh had established did not last long. Within ten years of his death, it was conquered by the British. The British had established a foothold in the Punjab at the conclusion of what is known as the first Anglo-Sikh war (1845-46). The second Anglo-Sikh war (1848-49) which took place in the reign of the minor Sikh Maharaja, Duleep Singh, ended in the abrogation of Sikh rule.

Unwarily a process of backsliding now took over. The decline had in fact set in during the days of Sikh power. The stern religious discipline which had sustained the Sikhs through a period of difficulty and privation gave way to a life of luxury and plenty. They lost what, following Ibn Khaldun, may be described as their "desert qualities." A second — and even more sinister — debilitating factor was the Brahmanical ritual and practice which had gained ascendancy as an adjunct of regal pomp and ceremony. These now took a firmer hold over the Sikh mind. In this way, Sikh faith became garbled beyond recognition. The teachings of the Gurus which had supplied Sikhism its potent principle of re-creation and consolidation were obscured by the rising tide of conservatism. It was fast losing its characteristic vigour and its

votaries were relapsing into beliefs and customs which the founding Gurus had clearly rejected. Absorption into ceremonial Hinduism seemed the course inevitably set for the Sikhs. This was the critical challenge they faced in the years following the British occupation of the Punjab.

Such had been the dereliction of the faith that several British observers prognosticated dismally for it. Some thought it was already dead; others felt it was irretrievably due for extinction. The following excerpt from the Punjab Administration Report for 1851-52 — a bare two years after the annexation of the Punjab — will illustrate:

The Sikh faith and ecclesiastical polity is rapidly going where the Sikh political ascendancy has already gone. Of the two elements in the old Khalsa, namely, the followers of Nanuck, the first prophet, and the followers of Guru Govind Singh, the second great religious leader, the former will hold their ground, and the latter will lose it. The Sikhs of Nanuck, a comparatively small body of peaceful habits and old family, will perhaps cling to the faith of their fathers; but the Sikhs of Govind [Singh] who are of more recent origin, who are more specially styled the Singhs or "lions" and who embraced the faith as

being the religion of warfare and conquest, no longer regard the Khalsa now that the prestige has departed from it. These men joined in thousands, and they now desert in equal numbers. They rejoin the ranks of Hinduism whence they originally came, and they bring up their children as Hindus. The sacred tank at Umritsar is less thronged than formerly, and the attendance at the annual festivals is diminishing yearly. The initiatory ceremony for adult persons is now rarely performed.

The fall in numbers supported the gloomy predictions about the final eclipse of the Sikh faith. A demographical detail was worked out by the British in 1855 in respect of the Lahore division. There were found only two hundred thousand Sikhs in an aggregate population of about three million. These figures related to the Majha region, known as the central home of the Sikhs. The following comment on this point is from the Punjab Administration Report for 1855-56:

This circumstance strongly corroborates what is commonly believed, namely that the Sikh tribe is losing its number rapidly. Modern Sikhism was little more than a political association (formed exclusively

from among Hindus), which men would join or quit according to the circumstances of the day. A person is not born a Sikh, as he might be born a Muhammadan or born a Hindu; but he must be specially initiated into Sikhism. Now that the Sikh commonwealth is broken up, people cease to be initiated into Sikhism and revert to Hinduism. Such is the undoubted explanation of a statistical fact, which might otherwise appear to be hardly credible.

The Sikhs, roughly estimated to be about ten million in Ranjit Singh's Punjab, dwindled to a mere 11,41,848 in the enumeration made in the Punjab in 1868. In the regular census of 1881, the Sikh figure stood at 17,16,114. This included the entire Punjab as well as the area covered by the Princely states, mainly Sikh.

Two factors reclaimed the Sikhs from this state — their adherence to the outward marks of their faith, especially the *kesa*, their hair and beards, and a series of protestant currents which arose among them to purify the prevalent religious usage and rekindle the Sikh spirit. Of these two, external religious symbols of their faith were the more crucial. But for these, relapse into the Hindu fold would have been swifter and categorical. That would have precluded the necessity for or possibility of any

reform. Despite the laxity in religious custom, the form they had received from Guru Gobind Singh — their hair and beards — helped them to retain their sense of individuality and cohesion. This eventually stimulated a process of self-regeneration. The first manifestation was the Nirankari movement originating in Sikh times. Its founder, Baba Dyal (1783-1855), was a contemporary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. A man of humble origin, he cavilled at the shortcomings of the mighty and assailed the rites and observances which had perverted the Sikh way of life. He re-emphasized the Sikh belief in Nirankar—the Formless One. From this, the movement he started came to be known as the Nirankari movement.

What an unambiguous, important development this Nirankari movement was in Sikh life will be borne out by this extract from the annual report of the Lodiana Mission for 1853:

Sometime in the summer we heard of a movement...which, from the representations we received, seemed to indicate a state of mind favourable to the reception of Truth. It was deemed expedient to visit them, to ascertain the true nature of the movement, and, if possible, to give it a proper direction. On investigation, however, it was found that the whole movement

was the result of the efforts of an individual to establish a new *panth* (religious sect) of which he should be the instructor and guide....They professedly reject idolatry, and all reverence and respect for whatever is held sacred by Sikhs or Hindus, except Nanak and his Granth.... They are called Nirankaris, from their belief in God, as a spirit without bodily form. The next great fundamental principle of their religion is that salvation is to be obtained by meditation on God. They regard Nanak as their saviour, inasmuch as he taught them the way of salvation. Of their peculiar practices only two things are learned. First, they assemble every morning for worship, which consists of bowing the head to the ground before the Granth, making offerings, and in hearing the Granth read by one of their numbers, and explained also if their leader be present. Secondly, they do not burn their dead, because that would assimilate them to the Hindus; nor bury them, because that would make them too much like Christians and Musalmans, but throw them into the river.

In its emphasis on the primacy of the Guru Granth Sahib in the Sikh system and on self-identity, the Nirankari movement foreshadowed

the principal concerns of the Singh Sabha reformation. This comment of the Ludhiana missionaries barely four years after the lapse of Sikh sovereignty falsifies the hastily advanced view that the new sense of self-consciousness among the Sikhs was the creation of British policy.

Like the Nirankari, the second reform movement known as the Namdhari, or Kuka, movement also had its origin in the northwest corner of the Sikh State, away from the places of royal magnificence such as Lahore and Amritsar. It harked back to a way of life more in keeping with the spiritual traditions of the community. Its principal concern was to spread the true spirit of Sikhism shorn of tawdry customs and mannerism which had grown on it since the beginning of Sikh monarchy. In the midst of national pride born of military glory and political power, this movement extolled the religious duty of a pious and simple living.

Because of their rather restricted scope and because of the schismatic character they had acquired, both Nirankari and Namdhari movements failed to stir the Sikh people as a whole. The Singh Sabha which followed them had a deeper impact and influenced the entire community. By leavening the intellectual and cultural processes, it brought a new dimension to the inner life of the community and marked a turning-point in Sikh history. It touched Sikhism

to its very roots, and made it a living force once again. The stimulus it provided has shaped the Sikhs' attitude and aspiration over the past one hundred years.

The main motivation of the Singh Sabha was search for Sikh identity. This entire period can be interpreted and understood in terms of this central concern. Under the Singh Sabha impulse, new powers of regeneration came into effect and Sikhism was reclaimed from a state of utter ossification and inertia. The Sikh mind was stirred by a process of liberation and it began to look upon its history and tradition with a clear, self-discerning eye. What had become effete and decrepit and what was reckoned to be against the Gurus' teachings was rejected. The purity of Sikh precept and practice was sought to be restored. Rites and customs considered consistent with Sikh doctrine and tradition were established. For some, legal sanction was secured through government legislation. With the reform of Sikh ceremonial and observances came the reformation of the Sikh shrines which, again, was clinched by an impressive demonstration of communal mobilization and by eventual legal sanction secured from the government of the day. This period of reform and of modern development also witnessed the emergence of new cultural and political aspirations. Literary and educational processes were renovated.

Through a strong political platform, the Sikhs sought to secure recognition for themselves.

What were the anxieties and apprehensions which assailed the more conscious among the Sikhs towards the close of the nineteenth century? I quote from a Punjabi newspaper of that time:

An English newspaper writes that the Christian faith is making rapid progress and makes the prophecy that, within the next twenty-five years, one-third of the Majha area will be Christian. The Malwa will follow suit. Just as we do not now see any Buddhists in the country except in images, in the same fashion the Sikhs, who are, here and there, visible in turbans and in their other religious forms like wrist-bangles and swords, will be seen only in pictures in the museums. Their own sons and grandsons turning Christians and clad in coats and trousers and sporting toadstool-like caps will go to see them in the museums and say in their pidgin-Punjabi: "Look, that is the picture of a Sikh — the tribe that inhabited this country once upon a time." Efforts of those who wish to resist the onslaughts of Christianity are feeble and will prove abortive like a leper without hands and feet trying to save a boy falling off a rooftop.

This was a note which appeared in the *Khalsa Akhbar* of Lahore, May 25, 1894, from the pen of its editor, Giani Ditt Singh. It reveals the nature of the identity crisis Sikhism faced at that time. But the real concern did not have so much to do with Christian proselytization as with absorption into the Hindu stream. Conversions had in any case been only few and far between.

Christian missionary activity had started in the Punjab with the influx of the English. Even while Ranjit Singh, the Sikh sovereign, reigned in Lahore, a Christian centre had been set up at Ludhiana, northwestern British outpost near the Sikh frontier. The founder was the Rev. John C. Lowrie, the first American missionary to travel to India, who reached Ludhiana on November 5, 1834, with the object of establishing a mission on behalf of the Western Foreign Missionary Society, Philadelphia. The Punjab presented to him "the best field of labour" because of its numerous and hardy population, better climate, ready access to the lower ranges of the Himalayan mountains in case of the failure of health. Another reason, as he records in his book, *Travels in North India*, was the Sikh population "to whom our attention at first was specially directed."

With the abrogation of Sikh rule in 1849, the Lodianna Mission extended its work to Lahore.

Two of its members, C.W. Forman and John Newton, were set apart for this duty and sent to the Punjab capital immediately. Amritsar, headquarters of the Sikh religion, became another important seat of Church enterprise. In 1852, T.H. Fitzpatrick and Robert Clark, the first missionaries of the Church of England appointed to the Punjab, arrived in station. In the valedictory instructions given them, they had been told: "Though the Brahman religion still sways the minds of a large portion of the population of the Punjab, and the Mohammedan of another, the dominant religion and power for the last century has been the Sikh religion, a species of pure theism, formed in the first instance by a dissenting sect from Hinduism. A few hopeful instances lead us to believe that the Sikhs may prove more accessible to scriptural truth than the Hindus and Mohammedans...."

Sikhs were especially alerted by an announcement coming from four pupils of the Amritsar Mission School — Aya Singh, Attar Singh, Sadhu Singh and Santokh Singh — making public their intention of forswearing their faith in favour of Christianity. This shocked Sikh feeling. Added to this was a series of carping lectures in Amritsar on Sikhism and the narration of Guru Nanak's life in deliberately garbled detail by Shardha Ram Phillauri, who had been engaged by the British to write a history of the Sikhs. To

consider these matters, some prominent Sikhs, including Thakur Singh Sandhanwalia (1837-87), Baba Sir Khem Singh Bedi (1832-1905) in direct descent from Guru Nanak, Kanwar Bikrama Singh (1835-87) of Kapurthala and Giani Gian Singh (1824-84) of Amritsar, convened a meeting in Amritsar. Thakur Singh, a man of learning who possessed the rare accomplishment of having mastered the two classical languages of the East, Sanskrit and Arabic, had been a member of the Golden Temple management board appointed by the British before he turned a rebel. In this capacity he had seen how Sikh custom and ritual had become corrupted and felt concerned about the general state of the Sikh community and its resilement from its traditions. As a result of the deliberations of the Amritsar meeting over which he presided, an association called the Sri Guru Singh Sabha came into being. This was on October 1, 1873. As laid down in its objectives, the Sabha undertook to (i) restore Sikhism to its pristine purity; (ii) edit and publish historical and religious books; (iii) propagate current knowledge, using Punjabi as the medium, and to start magazines and newspapers in Punjabi; (iv) reform and bring back into the Sikh fold the apostates; (v) interest the highly placed Englishmen in, and ensure their association with, the educational programme of the Sikhs. The Singh Sabha

gained quick support of diverse sections of the community and many Sikh scholars and leaders volunteered to join its ranks. Two of its major thrusts were the depreciation of un-Sikh customs and social evils and the encouragement of Western education. The progressive concern was as pronounced as the revivalist impulse. Initially, the supporters of the Singh Sabha encountered severe opposition. They were scorned and ridiculed for what appeared to be their novel ideas. An epigrammatic couplet satirizing their newfangled enthusiasm became part of Punjabi folklore:

When the barn is emptied of grain,
What better can you do than turn a Singh
Sabhia?

More mordant in humour was the villagers' deliberate corruption of the name of the movement from Singh Sabha to Singh Safa, *safa* signifying widespread destruction caused by the plague epidemic of 1902.

The Singh Sabha ideology percolated to the Sikh peasantry primarily through soldiers serving in the army or those who had retired from the service. One of the regiments had constituted a choir of reciters to go round the villages and sing hymns from the Scripture at Singh Sabha congregations. Singh Sabhas were now spring-

ing up in all parts of the Punjab. Apart from cities such as Amritsar, Lahore, Rawalpindi, Patiala and Simla, Singh Sabhas flourished in small towns and villages as well. The most energetic of these was the one at Bhasaur, a small village in the erstwhile Princely state of Patiala. More original and fundamental ideas flowed from it than from perhaps any other Singh Sabha in the Punjab.

In that period of intense religious and cultural interaction, the Christian missions had their own view of the Singh Sabha activity. To quote from the 61st Annual Report of the Lodiana Mission (1896): "In opposition to our work a Singh Sabha (a society of Sikhs) was started during the summer and a number of people were enrolled."

The Singh Sabha's response to the existing challenge was bipolar. It looked back to what was essential, to what was of fundamental import in the Sikh heritage. This was no delusive withdrawal into the past, but a positive recognition of the permanent, life-giving elements in it. At the same time, the Singh Sabha looked to the future, adapting itself to the changing situation, but without compromising its own ideals. It reacted constructively to the new forces, striking a balance between the opposite forms of creativity — absorption and rejection. Along with the revivalist impulse, it accepted the principle of

change and renovation and exhibited sensitiveness to contemporary needs. From this period of stirring of the spirit, the Sikhs emerged with a strong sense of self-preservation as well as with a will to move with the times. One of the more concretely formulated urges was for Western-style education so that they might refurbish their own religious and literary conventions and be able to compete with other communities for government employment and have their share in the power then available to Indians. In the farewell address presented to Lord Ripon, the outgoing Viceroy of India, on behalf of the Amritsar Khalsa Diwan on November 13, 1884, Kanwar Partap Singh of Kapurthala said:

Our efforts are now directed to secure the march of that intellectual progress permanently by setting up such institutions as colleges, schools, etc., which will become unceasing sources of benefit to our posterity.

The example of Christian missions led to the formation of Indian religious societies for opening and maintaining educational institutions after the new pattern. In northern India, this trend manifested itself in the rise of two popular movements — Aligarh and Arya Samaj, besides the third, i.e. Singh Sabha. They favoured the

Western-style education and adopted it in schools and colleges they sponsored. But they were simultaneously committed to reviving their distinctive religious and literary traditions. The cultural resurgence was thus channelized along communal lines. The Aligarh movement incarnated the urge of the Muslims for re-establishing their religious identity and for the development of the Urdu language. Likewise, Vedic religion and Hindi came to be equated with the Arya Samaj and Sikh values and Punjabi with the Singh Sabha.

A government college had been established at Lahore in 1864, with the famous linguist, Dr Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner, as Principal. Dr Leitner was a zealous advocate of oriental learning. He founded on January 21, 1865, the Anjuman-i-Punjab with a view to developing literature in Indian languages and disseminating popular knowledge through this medium. The Anjuman held meetings for the discussion of questions of literary, scientific and social interests, sent memorials to the government, established a public library and compiled a number of treatises and translations in Urdu, Hindi, and Punjabi. It also started an oriental school and was instrumental in the establishment, in 1870, of the Panjab University College which was assigned to "promoting the diffusion of European science, as far as possible, through the

medium of the vernacular literature generally, affording encouragement to the enlightened study of the Eastern classical languages and literature, and associating the learned and influential classes of the Province with the officers of Government in the promotion and supervision of popular education."

On October 14, 1882, this college was converted into the Panjab University. The Punjab Arya Samaj opened in Lahore, in 1886, a school which was raised to the standard of a university college in 1889. To have a college of their own for imparting instruction in English and in Western sciences and for promoting Punjabi and Sikh studies became an article of faith with the Sikhs. The leaders of the Singh Sabha worked assiduously to realize the objective. In 1890, Khalsa College Establishment Committee was set up, with Col. W.R.M. Holroyd, British Director of Public Instruction, Punjab, as president, and another Englishman, W. Bell, Principal of Government College, Lahore, as secretary.

The committee enlisted wide support for its plans and sought especially the help of the Sikh Maharajas who were persuaded to make liberal donations. A Khalsa College did materialize eventually. Sir James Lyall, Lieut-Governor of the Punjab, laid the foundation-stone of the building in Amritsar on March 5, 1892. The teaching started with the opening on October 22,

1893, of middle school classes in rented premises in the city.

Another important development was the establishment, in 1908, of the Sikh Educational Conference. A Sikh missionary group visiting Sind happened to attend one of the sessions of the Muhammadan Educational Conference at Karachi in December 1907. It struck them to have a similar conference for the Sikhs as well. Returning to Amritsar, the leader of the group, Sundar Singh Majithia, called a meeting on January 9, 1908, inviting leading Sikhs of the day. Among those who attended were the Sikh poet and mystic, Bhai Vir Singh (1872-1957), and Bhai Jodh Singh (1882-1981), educationist and theologian, who became the first Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University in 1962. Sardar Umrao Singh, father of the painter Amrita Sher-Gil, also lent his helping hand. Plans were formulated for the establishment of Sikh Educational Conference. Among the aims laid down for it were (a) spread of Western education among the Sikhs; (b) promotion of the study of Sikh literature; (c) improvement of Sikh educational institutions; (d) opening of new educational institutions; (e) furthering the cause of women's education among the Sikhs; and (f) promotion of technical and agricultural education. The first session of the Conference was held at Gujranwala on April 18-19, 1908. Under the auspices of the

Sikh Educational Conference, a number of Khalsa, or Sikh, schools were opened throughout the Punjab.

1873, which saw the birth of the Singh Sabha, was a crucial date in the modern period of Sikh history. For the Sikhs the Singh Sabha was a great regenerating force. It articulated the inner urge of Sikhism for reform and gave it a decisive turn at a critical moment of its history, quickening its latent sources of energy. A comparison between the state of Sikhism before the Singh Sabha and since will reveal the extent of its moral effect. The Sikh faith had waned incredibly before the first stirrings of the movement were felt. A sense of lassitude pervaded Sikh society which had sunk back into priest-ridden debilitating cults antithetical to Sikh precept. The teaching of the Gurus had been forgotten and the Guru Granth Sahib, confined to the *gurdwara*, had become the concern only of the Bhai and the Granthi. From this condition the Singh Sabha rescued the Sikhs, bringing to them a new awareness of their past and of the essentials of their faith. The Singh Sabha touched the very base, the mainspring of Sikh life and resuscitated the true content of Sikh belief and exercise. It restored to the Sikhs their creedal unity and their religious conscience. It opened for them the doors of modern progress and endowed them with the strength and adapt-

ability to match the pressures created by new developments in the realms of social thought and scientific discovery. The momentum which the Singh Sabha gave Sikh resurgence still continues. The principal concepts and concerns of Sikhism today are those given or restored to it by the Singh Sabha. Its understanding of Sikh history, belief and tradition retains its validity. The practice and ritual it established still prevail, largely and centrally. The form of Sikhism as defined by the Singh Sabha will remain valid for generations to come.

The Singh Sabha's eagerness for the promotion of education and Punjabi literature led to unprecedented activity in the fields of literature and learning. With a donation from Maharaja Hira Singh of Nabha, Khalsa Printing Press was set up at Lahore. Kanwar Jagjodh Singh, a grandson of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, started in his estate in Oudh the Guru Nanak Prakash Press. He employed several scholars with whose help he published a number of works in Punjabi. Newspaper and tractarian writing stimulated by the Singh Sabha movement established the form of Punjabi prose, disinheriting it of the more pretentious and conventional elements. The pioneer in the line was the weekly *Khalsa Akhbar* of Giani Jhanda Singh Faridkoti. This paper rose to its full stature under Giani Ditt Singh, who was one of the pioneers of the Singh Sabha

renaissance. He was a noted scholar and a considerable poet and especially excelled at argument, never yielding to anyone a point in polemics. He sometimes wrote the newspaper leaders and comments in Punjabi verse, too.

Another important newspaper of this period was the *Khalsa Samachar*, founded by Dr Charan Singh in 1899. It had the benefit of the association with it of Dr Charan Singh's son, Bhai Vir Singh. In the latter's hands, the *Khalsa Samachar* set up a high standard of Punjabi prose-writing and of religious discussion. Under the same patronage, the Khalsa Tract Society of Amritsar produced a series of books and tracts on Sikh lore and piety. Besides Punjabi, there were also papers started in Urdu. Among these two well-known ones were Bhai Mayya Singh's *Khalsa Gazette* and Sardar Amar Singh's *Loyal Gazette*, which later turned into the formidable *Sher-i-Punjab*.

Weightier works of learning on Sikh history and philosophy began to appear. Pandit Tara Singh Narotam (1822-91), a schoolman of the Nirmala order, wrote among other books a theological treatise *Gurmat Nirnai Sagar* (1877) as well as a lexicon of the Sikh scriptural texts *Gur Girarath Kosh*, completed in 1889 and published posthumously in two volumes — the first in 1895 and the second in 1898. His celebrated disciple, Giani Gian Singh (1822-1921), pub-

lished his classical volumes on the history of the Sikhs, namely the *Panth Prakash* (1880) and the *Twarikh Guru Khalsa* (1891). Pandit Sadhu Singh (1840-1907), another Nirmala scholar, treated of Sikh metaphysical and philosophical concepts in his famous work *Gur Sikkhia Prabhakar* (1892). Giani Hazara Singh, Giani Sardul Singh, Baba Sumer Singh of Patna Sahib and Dr Charan Singh were other eminent men of letters who enriched Sikh scholarship by their writings. After them came Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha (1867-1938) and Bhai Vir Singh. The former enjoyed unequalled celebrity for his impeccable taste and wide learning and wrote a number of books such as the *Gurmat Prabhakar* and the *Gurmat Sudhakar*, besides a comprehensive encyclopaedia of Sikh literature, the *Gurushabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh*. His *Ham Hindu Nahin* ("We are not Hindus", i.e. "Sikhs are not Hindus"), first published in 1897, reflected tellingly in its deliberately challenging title as well as in its daring argument the Singh Sabha emphasis on Sikh identity. Bhai Vir Singh presented the exemplary nobility and glory of Sikh character in his historical romances which have thrilled and influenced generations of Sikh readers. The *Puratan Janamsakhi*, which is one of the oldest accounts of Guru Nanak's life and which preserves the earliest style of Punjabi prose, was, with the help

of the government, resurrected from the British Museum and published. Raja Bikram Singh of Faridkot, one of the principal protagonists of the Singh Sabha, had a commentary of the Guru Granth Sahib prepared by a distinguished synod of Sikh schoolmen of the period. This work, popularly known as the *Faridkot Tika*, is the first authentic record of the traditional interpretation of the sacred texts coming down from the days of the Gurus, and is for this reason highly regarded in Sikh exegetical literature.

Some foreigners also took to the study of the Sikh religion. The India Office commissioned a German orientalist, Dr Ernest Trumpp, to render Sikh Scripture into English. To make up for the imperfections of Trumpp's work and to assuage the Sikh sentiment hurt by the offensive tone of some of his comments, Max Arthur Macauliffe (1841-1913), a member of the Indian Civil Service, resigned his post to undertake a fresh rendering of the Guru Granth Sahib. His translations of the Sikh hymns, along with a detailed history of the period covered by the Ten Gurus of the Sikhs, were published in six volumes by Oxford University Press in 1909. Among the Sikhs who first wrote of their religion in English were Nihal Singh Suri, who published translations of the sacred hymns, and Bhagat Lakshman Singh who wrote two admirable books, *Life of Guru Gobind Singh* and *Sikh Martyrs*.

Sewaram Singh published his book on the life and teaching of Guru Nanak in 1904, and Khazan Singh his *History and Philosophy of Sikh Religion* in 1914. Sant Teja Singh, who had taken his Master's degree at Harvard University, carried on missionary work among the Sikh immigrants in the United States and in Canada, published several tracts on Sikhism. The finest work in English came from the pen of Professor Teja Singh whose exposition of Sikhism and renderings of the holy texts, the *Japu*, the *Asa-di-Var* and the *Sukhmani*, created a new intellectual taste in the community. Till then only one frame of reference — the Vedantic — was available for the interpretation of Sikhism. Contact with Western thought brought forth many another standpoint and insight. A fresh understanding of Sikh philosophy and tradition began to emerge through the writings of the English-educated Sikh scholars.

One factor crucial to Singh Sabha's campaign for recovering Sikh identity was re-establishment of the centrality of the Guru Granth Sahib enjoined by Guru Gobind Singh when he declared it to be the Guru after him. Known variously as *Granth Sahib*, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, *Adi Granth*, *Sri Adi Granth* or *Adi Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the Guru Granth Sahib is the religious scripture of the Sikhs as well as Guru eternal for them. The basic word in the expres-

sions listed is *granth* meaning a book, *sahib* and *sri* being honorifics, *guru* indicating its status as successor in the Guruship after Guru Gobind Singh and *·adi*, literally the first, original or primary, distinguishing it from the other sacred book of the Sikhs, the *Dasam Granth*, which contains the poetic compositions of the Tenth (Dasam) Guru.

The Guru Granth Sahib is an anthology of the sacred compositions of the Gurus and of some of the medieval Indian saints. The latter came from a variety of class and creedal background — Hindu as well as Muslim, high-caste as well as low-caste. One criterion for choosing their verse for the Guru Granth Sahib apparently was its tone of harmony with the teaching of the Gurus. The anthology was prepared by Guru Arjun, the Fifth Guru, in 1603-04. To it were added by Guru Gobind Singh the compositions of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Guru. Even before the time of Guru Arjun, *pothi-s* or books, in Gurmukhi characters, existed containing the holy utterances of the Gurus. A line in Bhai Gurdas, Var I. 32, suggests that Guru Nanak during his travels carried under his arm a book, evidently containing his own compositions. According to the *Puratan Janamsakhi*, he handed such a manuscript to Guru Angad as he passed on the spiritual office to him. Two of the collections of hymns or *pothi-s* prior to the Guru

Granth Sahib are still extant. They are in the possession of the descendants of Guru Amar Das. One of the families in the line lives in Patiala and the *pothi* it has inherited is on view for the devotees in their home on the morning of the full-moon day every month. A collateral family which is in possession of the second *pothi* lives in the village of Darapur, in Hoshiarpur district of the Punjab.

The Gurus' *bani* or holy utterance was held in high veneration by the Sikhs even before the Holy Volume was compiled; also, by the Gurus themselves. It echoed the Divine Truth; it was the voice of God — "The Lord's own word," as said Guru Nanak in the Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Amar Das said:

*vahu vahu bani nirankar hai
tis jevad avar na koe*

Hail, hail the Word of the Guru
which is the Formless Lord Himself;
There is none other, nothing else to be
reckoned equal to it.

— GG, III, 515

Since the day Guru Gobind Singh had vested succession in it, the Guru Granth Sahib has commanded the same honour and reverence as would be due to the Guru himself. It is the focal

point of Sikhs' devotion. The only object of veneration in Sikh *Gurdwara*-s is the Guru Granth Sahib. *Gurdwara* is in fact that place of worship where the Guru Granth Sahib reigns. No images or idols are permitted inside a *gurdwara*. In the *gurdwara*, the Holy Volume is opened ceremonially in the early hours of the morning after *ardas* or supplication-cum-recollection. It must be enthroned, draped in silks or other pieces of clean cloth, on a high seat on a pedestal, under a canopy. The congregation takes place in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, with an officiant, who could be a regular incumbent or anyone from among those present, sitting in attendance, with a *chavar* or whisk in his hand which he keeps swinging over it in homage. The singing of hymns by a group of musicians will go on. All the time devotees have been coming and bowing low to the ground before the Holy Book to pay homage and taking their seats on the ground in front. The officiant or any other learned person, sitting in attendance of the Holy Book, will read from it a hymn and expound it for the audience. At the end of the service, the audience will stand up in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, with hands folded in front in reverence. A Sikh will lead the *ardas*. After the evening service, the Holy Book will be closed, again after a short prayer, and put to rest for the night. The Guru Granth Sahib is

similarly kept in some Sikh homes where a separate room is set apart for it. It is opened in the morning and put to rest in the evening in the same style and manner. Before starting the day's work, men and women will go into the room where the Guru Granth Sahib has been ceremonially installed, say a prayer in front of it and open the book at random and read the hymn at the top of the left page or continuing from the preceding one to obtain what is called *vak* or the day's lesson or order (*hukm*). Breviaries contain stipulated *bani*-s from the Guru Granth Sahib which constitute the daily offices and prayers of a Sikh.

A very beautiful custom is that of *akhand path* or uninterrupted recital of the Guru Granth Sahib from beginning to end. Such a recital must be completed within forty-eight hours. The entire Guru Granth Sahib, 1430 large pages, is read through in a single service. This reading must go on day and night, without a moment's intermission. The relay of reciters who take turns at saying Scripture must ensure that no break occurs. As they change places at given intervals, one picks up the line from his predecessor's lips and continues. When and how the custom of reciting the canon in its entirety in one continuous ceremony began is not known. Conjecture traces it to the turbulent days of the eighteenth century when persecution

scattered the Sikhs to far-off places. The practice of accomplishing in the shortest time a reading of the Holy Book by continuous recital is believed to have originated in those uncertain times when Sikhs driven away from their homes were not sure for how many days they would be respiting at a given spot.

Important days on the Sikh calendar are marked by *akhand path-s* in *gurdwara-s*. Celebrations and ceremonies in Sikh families centre around the reading of the Holy Book. The homes are filled with holiness for those two days and nights as the Guru Granth Sahib, installed with due ceremony in a room especially cleaned out for the occasion, is being recited. Apart from lending the air sanctity, such readings fill for listeners textual gaps. The listeners come as they wish and depart at their will. Thus they keep picking up snatches of the *bani* from different portions at different times. Without such ceremonial readings, the Guru Granth Sahib, a large volume, would remain generally inaccessible to the laity except for texts which are recited by Sikhs as part of their daily devotion. In bereavement, families derive comfort from these *path-s* or recitals. Obsequies in fact conclude with a completed reading of the Guru Granth Sahib and prayers are offered in its presence at the end for the departed soul. There are variations on *akhand path* as well. A com-

mon one is the *saptah path* wherein the recital of the text is taken in parts and completed within one week. A *sahaj* or slow-reading *path* may continue for a longer time, even for months. At such *path*-s the Holy Book is recited or intoned, not merely read. This brings out tellingly its poetic quality and its power to move and grip the listener. But it must be listened to in silence, sitting on the floor in front of it in a reverent posture.

The *bani* of the Guru Granth Sahib is all in the spiritual key. It is poetry of pure piety, artistic rather than philosophical, moral rather than cerebral. It prescribes no societal code, yet Guru Granth Sahib is the basis of Sikh praxis as well as of Sikh devotion. It is the living source of authority, the ultimate guide for the spiritual and moral path pointed by the Gurus. Whatever is in harmony with its tenor will be acceptable; whatever not, rejectable. Guidance is sought from it on doctrine, on the tenets of the faith.

The Sikh Panth as a whole will resort to the Guru Granth Sahib as will the individuals in moments of perplexity or crisis. Instance comes to mind of the early days of the Gurdwara movement aiming to reform the ritual in Sikh places of worship. On October 12, 1920, a meeting of Sikh backward castes, sponsored by the faculty and students of the Khalsa College at Amritsar, was held in the Jallianwala Bagh. The

following morning some of them were taken to the Golden Temple, but the *granthi*-s or clerics in control refused to accept *karahprasad* or sacrament they had brought as an offering and to say the *ardas* on their behalf. There was an outburst of protest against this discrimination towards the so-called low-caste Sikhs totally contrary to Sikh teaching. A compromise was at last reached and it was decided that the Guru's direction be sought. The Guru Granth Sahib was, as is the custom, opened at random and the first hymn on the page to be read began with the verse:

*Nirgunia no ape bakhshi lae bhai
satgur ki seva lai*

He receives into grace (even) those without
merit, O brother,
And puts them in the path of holy service.

— GG, III, 638

The Guru's verdict was clearly in favour of those whom the priests had refused to accept as full members of the community. This was triumph for reformist Sikhs. The *karahprasad* brought by the pilgrims was accepted and distributed among the congregation.

Singly or in groups, in their homes or in congregations in their places of worship, Sikhs

conclude their morning and evening prayer, or prayer said at any other time as part of personal piety or of a ceremony with a supplication called *ardas*. The *ardas* is followed by the recitation of these verses:

*agia bhai akal ki tabai chalayo panth
sabh sikhian kau hukm hai guru manio
granth
guru granthji maniyo pragat guran ki deh
jo prabhu ko milibo chahai khoj shabad
main leh*

By the command of the Timeless creator,
was the Panth promulgated.
All Sikhs are hereby charged
to own the Granth as their Guru.
Know the Guru Granthji to be
the person visible of the Gurus.
They who would seek to meet the Lord
In the Word as manifested in the Book shall
they discover Him.

This is the status, the significance of the Holy Book in the Sikh way of life. Restoring to the Guru Granth Sahib its central authority became the major concern of the Singh Sabha. By re-establishing its supremacy, it was able to rescue the Sikh community from the crisis it faced in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

III

SIKHISM: THE CREATIVE HALF-DECADE (1965-1969)

By coincidences of history, certain events, certain moments of fulfilment, certain auguries rich in promise came to be telescoped into the latter half of the sixties of the century which marked it out as the most significant period in the recent history of the Sikhs. Of very special import was the realization during this time of their political goal for which they had campaigned resolutely for several years. This was the period of time when the Sikh farmer in the Punjab started reaping the benefits of the Green Revolution, the name given to the massive wheat production by resort to new technology, which was the creation

primarily of his own enterprise and diligence. For the first time in their history, Sikhs observed within this span two important centenaries on their calendar, initiating unprecedented literary and cultural activity. Schools and institutions sprang up in the Punjab and in some other States in India dedicated to the academic study of the Sikh faith and tradition. A new interest was awakened in Sikh religion in the wake of the celebration of these anniversaries in countries abroad to which Sikhs had trickled out, especially after the partition of the Punjab at the time of the Independence of India. During this period, again, the Sikh form gained familiarity in societies abroad through local adherents — first such in the history of the tradition to join it.

The division of the Punjab in 1947 into two parts, one falling within Pakistan and the other within India, was a traumatic experience for the Sikhs. The toll of partition had been the heaviest for them. As a community they were the worst injured. The frontier drawn between India and Pakistan split them in twain, one half suddenly turned into a mass of uprooted, homeless and helpless refugee population, facing deprivation and massacre. Their economic losses were incalculable. They had to quit the rich canal colonies in western Punjab which they had developed with their sweat and toil and which had brought them prosperity. This had been an

important factor in the advance they had made in education and in the professions. Yet they survived the tragic convulsion of mass migration forced upon them by the partitioning of their homeland between the two new countries, India and Pakistan, born on August 15, 1947, and gradually found their feet in what was left of it on the Indian side of the border. As they overcame the initial shock and passed the first critical milestone, they discovered that they had not been wholly the losers. They acquired one perceptible advantage—concentration in a single territorial unit.

In pre-partition Punjab, the Sikhs were barely 13 per cent of the population. They were widely dispersed, without a compact base in any sizable area. The migration into Indian Punjab now bulked them together in a few contiguous districts. For a conscious and vigorous people like the Sikhs, with strong religious and cultural aspirations, this consolidation in one geographical tract was an unsuspected boon. By a strange turn of events, they had become integrated numerically as they had never been before. They were now concentrated in an area where they had strong cultural and historical roots.

It was apparent that the Sikhs were destined to play a critical role in residuary Punjab. This tract of land had become their asylum in their hour of distress. All of their concerns—cultural,

economic and political — were linked with it. The turmoil they had passed through had sharpened their sense of survival. Their political superstructure had remained more or less intact. The Shiromani Akali Dal, which since its inception in 1920 had been their principal political spokesman, was, with its headquarters in Amritsar on the Indian side of the border newly drawn, a platform still alive and flexible. It retained its grassroots affiliations as well as its aura of history. Its legacy of struggle and sacrifice was the Sikhs' most tangible political asset. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, the statutory association for the management of Sikh holy places, again based in Amritsar, kept the religious fabric unimpaired. The leaders, somewhat harassed by the speed of the events, had lost neither their morale nor their ambition. There were several dedicated and striking personalities among them. Giani Kartar Singh, the most adroit of politicians, was then president of the Shiromani Akali Dal. He had earned much popular gratitude and acclaim by his sustained and hazardous personal endeavours to have the expatriates come out safely from across the border. The mystique of Master Tara Singh, who had been president of the Shiromani Akali Dal as well as of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee for many years, still prevailed. His name was the mainstay of Sikh political psyche,

and he retained his capacity to rally the masses. Their faith in his integrity and in his powers of resolution was undiminished. These two men — Master Tara Singh and Giani Kartar Singh — steered the Sikhs into the new epoch, their paths not always converging.

A totally new advantage was the weight of numbers. The Muslims had ceased to be in East, i.e. Indian, Punjab. Political power was now to be shared by Hindus and Sikhs. All the Hindu and Sikh members of the United Punjab Legislative Assembly were assigned to the East Punjab. The Sikhs numbered thirty-three, ten having been returned in the 1946 elections on Congress nomination and twenty-three on Akali. The Hindu members belonged to the Indian National Congress. But the party was riven into two factions, one swearing fealty to Dr Gopi Chand Bhargava and the other to Bhim Sen Sachar. The Akali block was thus in an advantageous position. The Akalis had longed for power, and they quickly joined hands with the Congress to form the first government in the East Punjab. Their nominee, Baldev Singh, was already a member of Jawaharlal Nehru's Cabinet in New Delhi, holding the important portfolio of Defence. Giani Kartar Singh, then President of the Shiromani Akali Dal, told a Press conference in Jullundur that Sikhs would not demand any communal electorate and would cast in their lot

with the Congress, if appropriate safeguards were provided for them in the Indian Constitution.

One man who had not fully reconciled himself to the Akalis' thus compromising their political status was Master Tara Singh. Within a few days of the Working Committee of the Akali Dal deciding (March 17, 1948) to allow the Akalis to align themselves with the Congress, he began openly to express his cavils and misgivings. As days went by, his dissent became more pronounced, and he started speaking with a sharper thrust and with a surer instinct. A major enunciation of the doctrine of Sikh individuality of which he was a staunch exponent issued from the pulpit of the Sikh Students' Federation. The occasion was its second annual conference convened at Ludhiana, in the Punjab, on April 24-25, 1948. Master Tara Singh had been invited to give the presidential speech. By now he had completely shed his initial hesitation and ambivalence. The address he read at the Conference was frank and unambiguous—a statement which set the tone and direction of future Sikh politics. The point he stressed with earnest passion and with his natural powers of polemic was the need to preserve the political integrity of the Sikhs. He insisted that the Shiromani Akali Dal should retain its authority to take political decisions on behalf of the Sikhs and joined issue

with those who advocated merger with the Congress as the only course left for the Sikhs — the only option open if they wished to have a share in political power in independent India. He argued that real power could accrue only from the solidarity of the Sikhs and urged to this end the retention of the independent character of the Sikh body politic. His appeal was openly in the name of the Panth and he drew upon images and symbols from Sikh tradition and history to buttress his argument. Master Tara Singh's warning stirred the defensive instincts of the Sikh people; his strategy determined the future pattern of their political mobilization.

Developments took place which redoubled Sikhs' wariness. In the Indian Constitution then being drafted, no provision was made for the protection of the interests and rights of the Sikhs as a minority. On February 24, 1948, a special sub-committee with Vallabhbhai Patel as chairman and with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr Rajendra Prasad, Dr B.R. Ambedkar and K.M. Munshi as members, was appointed to examine, among the minorities' problems affecting East Punjab and West Bengal, the question of safeguards for the Sikhs. The Shiromani Akali Dal submitted to the sub-committee a charter of demands seeking for the Sikhs a separate electorate, 50 per cent seats for them in the Punjab legislature and 5 per cent in the Central, reser-

vation for them of seats in Uttar Pradesh and Delhi legislatures, and of a certain percentage in the Indian army, and the same privileges for their Sikh counterparts as were proposed for Hindu scheduled castes. The special sub-committee of the Advisory Committee on Minorities sympathized with the Sikhs for "the emotional and physical strain" which had been their lot but turned down the Akali memorandum, saying, "We cannot recommend either communal electorate or weightage in the legislatures, which are the main demands of the Shiromani Akali Dal." The Advisory Committee upheld the view of the sub-committee and recommended at a meeting on May 16, 1949, that the "statutory reservation of seats for religious minorities should be abolished."

Sikhs' most intimate concern at that time was about the preservation of their historical and cultural individuality. Master Tara Singh became the symbol of this urge. In political terms, this urge found expression in the demand for a Punjabi-speaking state. Proposals for readjustment of the boundaries of the Punjab with a view to securing a more balanced intercommunal power structure had emanated from Sikhs from time to time; the first such suggestion for a new "territorial arrangement" was made by Ujjal Singh at the first Round Table Conference in London in 1930. They were in a

stronger position now to demand realignment on the basis of language. Their numerical consolidation in a compact territory proved an incentive as well as an asset. The failure of the Punjab government to make the language of the people, i.e. Punjabi, the official language of the state provided them with their sharpest argument. The ruling Congress party was itself pledged to recasting linguistically states in the country which as then constituted were more the outcome of the exigencies of British policy and conquest than of any rational planning. In fact some of them had under popular pressure been redemarcated on the basis of language, but the Sikhs' demand for the creation of a Punjabi-speaking state continued to be resisted. The States Reorganization Commission appointed in 1953 turned down the Sikhs' plea and, instead of splitting the Punjab, recommended its enlargement by integrating with it the states of PEPSU and Himachal Pradesh. It is true that, in the case of Sikhs, the demand for a language area had its political connotation, but he who opposed it on this ground or on the ground that its acceptance would strengthen the Sikhs politically in the region was himself betraying a sectarian predisposition. Master Tara Singh drove the argument home untiringly.

A Punjabi-speaking state — Punjabi Suba, in popular terminology — became the focus of

Sikhs' political ambition. They pursued the demand with the full power of their will. They mobilized all their resources behind it and fought for it stubbornly. A variety of tactics came into play. Widespread agitations were followed by negotiations across the table. Political manoeuvre alternated with electoral pressure. The Shiromani Akali Dal made Punjabi Suba the central plank in parliamentary elections and in the elections to the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. The latter, confined to the Sikh electorate alone, became in effect communal plebiscites on the issue. The Gurdwara elections held in December 1954 returned a verdict totally in favour of Punjabi Suba. The Akali Dal carried all of the 132 seats except three won by the opponent Khalsa Dal, supported by Congress Sikhs. The Akali Dal obtained a similar vote from the Sikhs in the Gurdwara elections of 1960.

Public demonstrations in behalf of Punjabi Suba were punctuated with introvert spiritual contemplation. For the moral replenishment of the Akali cadre, Master Tara Singh held three such mass religious camps — Gurmat Maha Samagam at Amritsar (June 11, 1948), Gurmat Maha Samagam at Patiala (September 1-2, 1951) and Jap Tap Samagam at Anandpur Sahib (July 16, 1953). In line with this style was the leaders' temporary withdrawal from the political scene and resort to seclusion for a life of penance and

prayer. Sant Fateh Singh, one-time colleague of Master Tara Singh who eventually wrested command of the movement from the hands of the latter, retired to the sacred sanctuary of Guru ka Lahore, near Anandpur, and remained in meditation for forty days (April 24, 1963 to June 2, 1963). Master Tara Singh imposed upon himself a six-month exile (January 21, 1965 to July 24, 1965), spent in the quiet of a small hill village called Salogara.

Conferences, conventions and *divan*-s were accompanied with a steady stream of pamphleteering. Representations and memorials were supplemented by marches and processions. The critical sanction was obtained through gaol-going which had never been witnessed on this scale in the country before. Self-immolating fasts by the leaders in behalf of the demand were the extreme measures taken. These, without precedent in Sikh tradition, recoiled on the individuals concerned, but did succeed in arousing popular fervour.

Help came from Sikhs in other parts of India as well. This wide dispersal of the Sikhs was itself a new phenomenon. While it had consolidated the major proportion of their population in the heart-land of the Punjab, the partition of 1947 had also led to considerable migrations to remoter corners of the country. Sikh communities settled in foreign lands such as Malaysia,

the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada gave their full support to the campaign for Punjabi Suba. They contributed funds and sent volunteers to join the *marcha*-s. South-east-Asian Sikhs, for instance, assembled at Singapore on November 27, 1960, under the chairmanship of Sarban Singh of Tat Khalsa Diwan, and constituted an action committee to aid the movement in the Punjab. In face of a national crisis or emergency, however, the temper changed. The Sikhs called a halt to the agitation and spontaneously lined themselves behind the government. This happened in 1962 at the time of the Chinese aggression and again in 1965 when hostilities with Pakistan broke out.

Another strategy which remained a persistent, though subordinate, *leitmotif* of the political plot was the easy passage of Akalis into the Congress fold and their equally smooth retraction from it. During their consort with the Congress, the Akali converts were able to have certain points conceded. The seed of the Punjabi Suba was, for instance, sown by Giani Kartar Singh, one of Master Tara Singh's former colleagues, who, as a Congress minister in Bhim Sen Sachar's government, had the Punjab demarcated into two discrete zones, one Punjabi-speaking and the other Hindi-speaking, for determining the medium of instruction in schools.

Political confirmation of these boundaries was the inevitable next step, though between these two there lay a whole era of severe strife and turmoil.

The greatest single asset was the person of Master Tara Singh. He was the impelling force behind the movement. He supplied the inspiration as well as the argument. Besides being deeply religious, he had a strong political intuition. He was a born crusader — a fighter by instinct, possessing qualities of tenacity and fearlessness. With his fiery conviction, he kept alive the Sikhs' protest as well as their faith in their future. His capacity to rouse the masses and sustain their ardour was enormous. He couched his appeal in the religious vocabulary and symbolism of the Sikhs. Sikh nationalism spoke through Master Tara Singh in its most intimate and authentic tones.

He was a tactician of acknowledged skill. He chose with care the issue to contest, and he chose his own moment to strike. He hammered at his point remorselessly. Not a very eloquent speaker, he was a fluent writer and kept urging the Sikhs to their destiny through his newspaper columns and countless tracts and written addresses given at various Sikh assemblies. He could mix emotion with logic, religious appeal with political slogan, and never lacked for ideas.

Master Tara Singh was also the principal

fund-raiser. He took donations from his personal friends and landed and industrial interests in sympathy with the Shiromani Akali Dal. The legend commonly ran that every penny given him was a penny in safe trust. Master Tara Singh provided the basic plank and the impulse, but did not worry himself about the details which were left to the younger men in command. The overall direction of the campaign, nevertheless, remained in his hands for a number of years. He could be emotional and temperamental, but he never lost his dignity or his native culture. He kept the movement firmly under control and did not allow it ever to transgress the bounds of constitutionality or to surrender its peaceful and non-violent character. It is indeed noteworthy how large-scale agitations he initiated remained so completely exempt from violence of any kind.

The Sikhs launched two major campaigns for the attainment of their political goal, i.e. a Punjabi-speaking state or Punjabi Suba — first in 1955 and the second in 1960. Both were peaceful movements. In the former, 20,000 Sikhs, including legislators, writers and lawyers, courted arrest; in the latter more than 50,000 — exactly 57,129, to go by the official Akali reckoning — went to gaol. Under this popular pressure, government's resistance to the demand of the Sikhs for restructuring the

boundaries of the Punjab with a view to establishing a Punjabi-speaking state was relaxing. A final argument was provided by their bold and patriotic role in the Indo-Pak conflict of 1965. In the border districts the Sikh population rose to a man to meet the crisis. It stood solidly behind the combatants and assisted them in many different ways. It provided guides to the newly inducted troops and offered free labour and vehicles, country carts, tractors and trucks, to transport supplies to the forward-most trenches. Instead of evacuating in panic to safer places, Sikhs numerically predominant in the frontier districts, stuck fearlessly to their homes, plying their ploughs and tending their cattle. Along the main approach routes to the front, they set up booths serving refreshments to the soldiers. Besides a vast number of Sikh troops fighting all along the border from Kutch to Rajasthan and Ladakh, almost all senior officers in the Punjab sector were Sikhs. The Commander, Lieut-General Harbakhsh Singh, a Sikh from Sangrur, the capital of the former Princely state of Jind, fewer than forty miles from where I come from, was commonly acknowledged as the architect of Indian victory.

Clearly, the moment of fulfilment had arrived. The ceasefire came about on September 22, 1965. On September 6, the Union Home Minister, Gulzari Lal Nanda, had made a state-

ment in Parliament saying that "the whole question of formation of Punjabi-speaking state could be examined afresh with an open mind." On September 23, recalling his statement of September 6, he announced in Parliament that the government had decided to set up a committee of the Cabinet consisting of Shrimati Indira Gandhi, then India's Information Minister, Shri Y.B. Chavan and Shri Mahavir Tyagi to pursue the matter further. The Home Minister requested the Speaker of Parliament and the Chairman of the Upper House, Rajya Sabha, to set up for the purpose a Committee consisting of members chosen from both Houses of Parliament. The Congress party also took up the issue in earnest. On November 16, 1965, the Punjab Congress Committee debated it for long hours, with Giani Zail Singh, now India's Home Minister*, and General Mohan Singh, formerly of the Indian National Army, lending it their full support.

The Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee was the eminent Sikh jurist, Hukam Singh, who had been president of the Akali Dal and was then the Speaker of Parliament. He was able to secure from his Committee representing a variety of political opinion a unanimous vote in favour of the creation of Punjabi Suba. Events

*Elected President of India in 1982.

moved fast. The Committee handed in its report on March 15, 1966. The Congress Working Committee had already adopted a motion recommending to the Government of India to carve a Punjabi-speaking state out of the then-existing Punjab. The only member to oppose the resolution was Morarji Desai. The report of the Parliamentary Committee was made public on March 18, 1966. Mrs Indira Gandhi who had, after the sudden death of Lal Bahadur Shastri, taken over, on January 24, 1966, as Prime Minister finally conceded the demand on April 23, 1966, and a commission was appointed to demarcate the new states of Punjab and Haryana. On September 3, the Punjab Re-organization Bill was introduced in Parliament and on November 1, 1966, the Punjabi-speaking state became a reality. The happiest man on that day was the Akali leader, Sant Fateh Singh. A lifelong bachelor, he greeted the announcement with the words: "A handsome baby has been born into my household."

With the birth of the new Punjab, Sikhs had entered the most creative half-decade of their modern history. The realization of a dominant political ambition oftentimes heralds the advent of political power. This came strikingly true for Sikhs in the Punjab. On March 8, 1967, Gurnam Singh, leader of the Akali party in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, took over as chief minister

of the State.

This was the time when the Green Revolution had started showing results in the Punjab bringing prosperity to the farmers, 80 per cent of whom were Sikhs. The beginnings of the Green Revolution go back to 1963 when about 150 strains of dwarf wheat were received in India from Dr N.E. Borlaug, in Mexico. They were distributed among wheat-breeders in Ludhiana, Delhi and Kanpur. Research was carried on at the Punjab Agricultural University at Ludhiana under Dr D.S. Athwal on three chosen strains. Seeds were multiplied and demonstrations were laid out on private farms. In 1966, these demonstrations spread over a large area; by 1969 the entire agricultural area of the Punjab had become one extensive demonstration field. Punjab's, and thereby India's, granary became full. In 1966-67, Sikhs observed the 300th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh and in 1969 the quincentennial of Guru Nanak's birth. Both events set in motion a cultural process which brought to Sikhs a new awareness of their religious heritage. At about the same time occurred two altogether momentous developments — the exodus of Sikhs from Africa into the United Kingdom and the extraordinary dissemination of the Sikh faith here in the United States. The true import of these must extend into, and be unravelled by, future history.

Observance of the anniversaries of the Gurus is a conspicuous feature of the Sikh way of life. A line frequently quoted from the sacred texts reads: *babarian kahanian put sput kareni*, i.e. it only becomes worthy progeny to remember the deeds of the elders. The Sikhs have a special word for these celebrations — *gurpurb* or holy festival in honour of the Guru. Among the more important annual events are the birth anniversaries of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, the first and the last, respectively, of the Ten Gurus, and days commemorating the anniversaries of the martyrdom of Guru Arjun and Guru Tegh Bahadur. Alongside of these may be mentioned Baisakhi, or the first of the Indian month of Baisakh, which marks the birth of the Khalsa Panth, promulgated on that day by Guru Gobind Singh. What happens on these occasions is a mixture of the religious and the festive, the devotional and the spectacular, the personal and the communal.

Sikh fervour for *Gurpurb*-celebration had an unprecedented outlet at the time of the tercentenary of Guru Gobind Singh's birth in 1966-67. The Guru Nanak quinquecentennial was then in sight: this gave further fillip to the activity planned for the occasion. There is no indication whether centennials previously had come in for any special attention. References are traceable to a proposal for celebrating the second centen-

nial of the birth of the Khalsa in 1899. This came from Max Arthur Macauliffe, who had devoted his lifetime to the study of Sikh lore and religion and produced that monumental 6-volume work on the Sikhs which remains to this day un superseded in scholarship and which is, for the layman as well as for the cognoscente, especially in the West, the best introduction to the origins of the Sikh faith and its Scripture. As old records tell us, Macauliffe felt saddened by the fact that his suggestion for celebrating with due honour the two-hundredth birth anniversary of the Khalsa had not mustered much support.

The tercentenary of Guru Gobind Singh's birth which fell in 1967 turned out to be a major celebration. Much before the actual day, suggestions had started coming forth from various quarters for celebrating it in a befitting manner. The first concrete step was taken by the chief minister of the Punjab, Ram Kishan, who called a widely representative convention in Patiala, issuing invitations in his own name. Arrangements for the meeting which took place on August 8, 1965, were made by a government functionary, the local district magistrate. Maharaja Yadavinder Singh of Patiala took the chair. Besides members of the Punjab Cabinet, Bhai Sahib Bhayee Ardaman Singh of Bagrian, Baba Jagjit Singh, leader of the Namdhari sect, Raja

Harindar Singh of Faridkot, the Nawab Sahib of Malerkotla, and many scholars and public men, Sikh, Hindu and Muslim, attended the meeting. Several proposals emerged from the deliberations. These embraced establishment of centres for research on life, works and philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh, setting up of memorials at places connected with his life, and publication of literature and souvenirs pertinent to the occasion. The chief minister announced on behalf of the Punjab Government a donation of Rs 1,200,000, and — believe it or not — the figure was by an error repeated in the following year's State budget. A worthier error was perhaps never committed by the finance minister of a government anywhere in the world.

The next meeting was held in the chandeliered hall of the palace of the Maharaja of Patiala, with a large portrait of Maharaja Ala Singh, 18th-century Sikh hero and founder of the Patiala dynasty, overlooking the assembly from one side and August Schoefft's famous canvas depicting Maharaja Ranjit Singh's *darbar* with a replica in gold of the Amritsar Golden Temple below it, from the other. Past and present thus converged at the time of that small Sikh assembly on November 30, 1965, refracting history into the current moment. This conclave led to the chartering of the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation with Maharaja Yadavinder Singh of Patiala as

president, Sardar Ujjal Singh, then the State governor as senior vice-president, State chief minister Ram Kishan as vice-president and Giani Zail Singh as general secretary. Chandigarh was named the headquarters of the Foundation. One of the several sub-committees appointed was charged with planning and bringing out literature appropriate to the occasion. This committee within an year's time brought out 48 publications which included Professor Puran Singh's *Guru Gobind Singh: Reflections and Offerings*, a commemoration volume, illustrated books for children and a biography of Guru Gobind Singh in English which was translated into all major Indian languages, including Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, Marathi, Gujarati, Oriya, Sindhi, Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam, Kannada, Kashmiri and Maithili. Professor Puran Singh's book was in fact published here in the United States by the Sikhs of California in a very handsome format. It was originally Professor Puran Singh's unpublished manuscript which came to the Punjabi University at Patiala along with his other manuscripts and papers donated by his son, Raminder Singh, in 1966. At Paonta Sahib on the banks of the Jamuna, the Guru Gobind Singh Foundation raised a writers' home called Vidyasar. *Vidyasar* or *Vidyadhar* was, according to Bhai Santokh Singh (*Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*), the name given the voluminous

work containing the writings of Guru Gobind Singh as well as of those of the 52 poets who lived with him at Paonta Sahib. The volume was unfortunately lost in the Sirsa stream as Guru Gobind Singh was crossing it after evacuating Anandpur Sahib on December 5-6, 1705.

Another permanent monument emerged in the shape of the Guru Gobind Singh Department of Religious Studies at the Punjabi University, Patiala. The funds were provided by the Punjab Government as well as by the University Grants Commission. The Department, embracing the study of major religious traditions of the world, was the first of its kind at an Indian university. The idea was primarily owed to the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University whose distinguished director, Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith, the famous Islamicist, helped with advice. The Department started functioning in 1967. The building in which the Department is located is, again, inscribed to Guru Gobind Singh.

The Department, which began only as a research set-up and registered candidates for M. Phil. and Ph.D. degrees in the field of Religion, has now broken into teaching as well and enrolls students for M.Phil. which is a two-year programme, after M.A., comprising course work as well as a dissertation. Candidates are encouraged to take up, as far as possible, interfaith

subjects for research. The first Ph.D. produced by the Department was a German-born Buddhist monk. A recent one is an Indian Christian, who worked on the subject of the Concept of Word in Sikhism and Christianity.

Another significant development was the establishment of a college of Sikh studies affiliated to the Guru Gobind Singh Department of Religious Studies. Managed by the Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi, this college in Patiala — called Gurmat College — concentrates on the study of Sikh religious texts, history and philosophy, preparing students for a Master's degree at the Punjabi University. Again, this is the only school anywhere accredited by a university for academic work on Sikh tradition. From its portals have emerged scholars who are pursuing research in the area of Sikh studies at the doctoral level as well as those who have taken up appointments as teachers in colleges. A few have become newspaper and journal editors.

Celebrations for the 300th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh established a trend as well as a style. Two years later came the 500th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak. Preparations began on a still larger scale and, to co-ordinate programmes in different parts of India and in countries abroad, a central association, called the Guru Nanak Foundation, was set up, with Maharaja Yadavinder Singh of Patiala again as

president. The Maharaja circulated a world-wide appeal which he concluded with these words: "I would welcome everyone, irrespective of religious belief, to join us to establish something in India and other places in the world, where people can understand his [Guru Nanak's] great teachings and translate the greatness of all religions, for there is very little difference...."

Apart from celebrations in the usual format of congregational gatherings, religious processions, *akhandpath-s* and *langar-s*, the main focus was on academic and literary activity. The Punjab Government established at Amritsar a university in the name of Guru Nanak which was inaugurated on November 24, 1969, by the President of India, Shri V.V. Giri. The University Grants Commission sanctioned the establishment of five chairs at selected universities — Panjab, Banaras, Jadavpur (Calcutta), Madras and Amritsar — for research on the life and teachings of Guru Nanak and on Sikh tradition as a whole.

With the same religious fervour, with the same eclat, some other days have since been observed, too: in 1973, the first centenary of the birth of the Singh Sabha; in 1975 the third centenary of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur; in 1977 the fourth centenary of the founding by Guru Ram Das of the city of Amritsar; in 1979 the 500th anniversary of the birth of the

Third Guru, Guru Amar Das; in 1980 the 200th anniversary of the birth of Maharaja Ranjit Singh; and recently, in 1982, the third birth centennial of Baba Dip Singh, the martyr.

To pick on an instance, Sikhs' massive, 1000-km-long march from Anandpur Sahib to Delhi and back to mark the 300th anniversary of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur must have been some kind of a world record. The march, from December 4, 1975, to December 7, 1975, followed the same route as taken by Guru Tegh Bahadur on his way to the Indian Capital to lay down his life. This procession was more than 10 km long, with nearly half a million people taking part in it. Countless were the cars, buses, trucks and scooters comprising the procession, which was accompanied by leading Sikhs such as Sardar Gurcharan Singh Tauhra, president of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Giani Zail Singh, the State chiefminister, Sardar Buta Singh, a deputy minister in the Union Government, and Maharaja Amarinder Singh of Patiala. During the march, the processionists were served with food, sweets, and fruit by spectators lining up along almost the entire route. The packets continued to be showered upon the processionists all the way. Hundreds of arches had been erected along the route for their reception. In Delhi, food was prepared in huge quantities for the vast con-

course of several hundred thousand people in *langar-s*, all by voluntary contributions and *seva*.

In this spontaneous enthusiasm for anniversary celebrations is reflected Sikhs' response to the historical memory of the Gurus and to important events of their history. Visible here is their deep commitment to their faith, their joyous and urgent participation in their historical tradition, their communal cohesion and their love of the spectacular. The Sikhs have always felt that their faith is not as widely known as it deserved to be. They are conscious of the limitations of their own scholarly presentation of their tradition which has kept it confined within provincial bounds. The fact of their being a small group numerically also imposes upon them a defensive self-consciousness. In the anniversaries and centennials — chronologies are already being studied to locate further likely occasions (the most important and dramatic one will be the 300th birth anniversary of the Khalsa coming off in the closing year of the current century) — they see opportunities for the assertion of identity and for the projection of a heritage which they think has a larger meaning than hitherto given it.

Sikhs continue to be rooted in the Punjab, yet they have over the years become an international community. This poses a new situation—

for Sikhs abroad as well as for Sikhs at home. For Sikhs abroad, there is the problem of coming to terms with, of relating to, cultures in which they live, of maintaining their form and identity and of keeping in perspective the historical locus of their origin. They have to bring out the best in their tradition and character and they have to mingle naturally with and contribute to societies to which they now belong. Interaction with other faiths and cultures can generate new strengths for them. They can thereby bring new verve and vigour to their own religious belief and practice and reinterpret these from fresh standpoints in the modern context. Thus they can—and must—help to further develop and enrich the Sikh thought and heritage. They must also try to perceive what meaning Sikh teaching has for the world community. The Sikhs at home have to devise ways and means of reaching out to communities in other parts comprehending their peculiar situation and problems and of helping them to improve the quality of their religious life.

For obvious reasons, the Sikh community in the United States constitutes a very vital unit. It is widely scattered, yet cultural concerns and aspirations of geographically disparate groups remain the same. *Gurdwara-s* have come up in many places. When I was in the United States for the first time in 1964, there were only two *gurdwara-s* in the country; now there are many.

Likewise, there are religious and cultural societies spread all over. Very enthusiastically, Sikhs own and mean to perpetuate their religious and historical legacy. There are Sikhs in the professions here and in business and in farming. Most of them are doing very well; some outstandingly successful and prosperous. There are Sikh academics and some local adherents as well. All this makes for a picturesque and lively conspectus. What I would especially wish to suggest on this occasion is that the religious and social activity spread widely be provided a central focus. Establishment of some kind of a Sikh international centre could be one initial step. Such a centre might be the emblem of the unity of the Sikhs living in different parts of the world. It could create facilities for spreading knowledge about Sikhism, for enlisting men with higher learning in Sikhism who could guide local communities in Sikh living, for producing reading materials for the youth, preparing them for a meaningful role as Sikhs in a fast-changing world. The centre could be a clearing-house of information about Sikh communities in other countries. It could maintain active liaison with universities here which offer programmes in South Asian Studies and thereby provide incentive, and create opportunities, for advanced academic work on Sikhism. It could be in touch with societies such as the Punjab Studies Con-

ference in the United States which has as its constituents scholars in America and Canada working on different aspects of Punjab history, culture and economy. The centre could establish an art gallery and invite to this end Sikh artists such as Kirpal Singh and Jaswant Singh who have captured in paint many an outstanding personality and many a stirring event from Sikh history. The most important task for the centre to undertake will be the setting up of a viable Sikh library. It could also provide necessary amenities for American scholars interested in Sikh history, literature and culture. The centre could also institute fellowships for Sikh young men to come from other countries such as East Africa, Thailand and Malaysia as temporary resident scholars, and run classes for teaching Punjabi and for *kirtan*, i.e. singing of the sacred hymns. It could also provide temporary lodgings to Sikh students, researchers and scholars. Under a wholetime director, who, besides, being an administrator, should be a person of scholarly accomplishment, the centre could arrange lectures, set up seminars and symposiums and organize celebrations. In short, a centre of this conception will have immense possibilities and I shall very seriously put forward this proposal to the Sikh community in California.

In winding up this series, I must once again

express my gratitude to the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies for affording me the opportunity of making these presentations on the Sikh faith at this forum. Co-participant in this programme has been the Sikh Center of the Pacific Coast to which too I render my acknowledgements. My warmest thanks, also, to my very charming hosts, by now very valued friends, Professor Mark Juergensmeyer, Professor Bruce R. Pray, and Professor Robert Goldman. I have immensely enjoyed my stay at Berkeley and have had the chance of visiting with several very friendly and hospitable families. How will I ever be able to repay their kindness?

...Also brought out most ably is the way in which an assertion of identity is linked necessarily to a sense of heritage and a forward-looking and very natural desire for a place in the sun. The author has, in fact, with his unobstrusive scholarship and gentle wisdom, made us understand many of the forces which are at work in India today.

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