

GURU ARJAN DEV

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INTRODUCTION

The story of the ten Gurus, or spiritual preceptors, of the Sikh faith is spread over a little more than two centuries—from Guru Nanak (1469-1539) to Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708). These few decades constitute a long saga of struggle on the part of the Gurus, struggle in pursuit of a new ideology and struggle to create a nation of strong and self-respecting people out of a divided and etherised society. With this end in view, the Gurus first articulated a distinct metaphysical thought and then established certain institutions so as to put that precept into practice. Guru Nanak, the founder of the faith, only proclaimed in one of his hymns that one desirous of treading the path of truth must be willing to sacrifice his head – *jau tau prem khelan ka chau siru dhari tali gali mori au* (GG.S. I, 1412). About two centuries later, Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and the last of the person Gurus, put this call into practice in the historic assembly which gathered on the Vaisakhi day in AD 1699 as he created the Khalsa: he addressed the gathered assembly and asked those willing to lay down their lives for the cause of righteousness to come forward to give away their heads.

It can never be an easy task to make people discard the way of life they had been following since centuries even if it were degenerate and decadent, corrupt and hypocrite. It is ever still more difficult to persuade them to follow a different, new way of life. This implied exhorting human beings to endeavour for their spiritual as well as social progression, for the transformation of this decadent and corrupt society into Sach Khand or the realm of Truth. This involved a long-drawn and arduous struggle wherein persecution, suffering and even death had to be willingly and smilingly faced. During the period preceding the Gurus, India was ruled by the Lodhi dynasty of the Muslims and their reign was marked by injustice and oppression, intolerance and corruption. Welfare of the masses was nowhere on their agenda and they even failed to protect them against any outside invasions. Although

Guru Nanak sees Babar, who invaded India when it was ruled by Ibrahim Lodhi, as an unwitting instrument of the divine will to punish the Lodhi rulers for having violated the laws of God yet he feels equally concerned at the death and devastation caused in the wake of Babar's invasion.

The socio-religious life in the medieval India when Sikhism originated had reached its lowest ebb. There were then two predominant religions, Hinduism and Islam, and the followers of both these traditions had become false and hypocrite. The Vedas had become unintelligible to the common man and only those forms and rituals prevailed which the Brahmins felt beneficial to their class. Similarly, the clergy in Islam had also become corrupt and materialistic. The Hindu society was hierarchically divided into different *varnas* and this division had grown more rigid with the passage of time. Consequently, a sizeable section of society was deprived of its social as well as spiritual rights. Both the faith-communities lived in complete isolation of each other, with almost no meeting point between them. A Hindu was a *kafir* to the Muslims, and a Muslim was a *malechh* to the Hindus. No doubt, the protagonists of the Sufi and the Bhatki movements tried to bring about a change in their mindset but they met with only partial success. The Gurus were well aware that nothing less than a revolution can work to raise the humans spiritually and socially, to imbibe a sense of dignity in a gutless society, and to make the etherised people regain their self-respect and dignity. That is why their attempt from the very beginning was to create a new social structure outside the prevalent Hindu and Muslim social structures.

Sikhism originated with Guru Nanak about five hundred years back in the north-west of the Indian sub-continent. Thus, chronologically, it belongs to the medieval period in Indian history but an in-depth study of the faith, its beliefs and practices reveals its critical attitude towards the medieval spirit and its responsiveness to modernity. It is also the youngest of major world religions and being the youngest, it can also be called the latest stage in the evolution of the religious consciousness of mankind. It originated in India but has since spread throughout the world despite the fact that it is not a missionary faith. No doubt, the Sikh expansion is mainly because of the Sikh Diaspora, but dissemination of knowledge about the faith has also helped in this expansion, though in a limited way. If the Sikhs today are able to

adjust and adapt to alien cultural and religious situations, it is because their faith has answers to many questions and queries posed by modernity.

The Sikh faith is based primarily on the mystic experiences of its Gurus. The founder of the faith, Guru Nanak, had the revelation around the turn of the fifteenth century. The revelation that Guru Nanak received has two peculiar traits: one, unlike Islam where Prophet Mohammad received the Divine revelation indirectly through archangel Gabriel, Guru Nanak received it direct from Nirankar, the Sikh term for the formless God. Second, he did not receive it in piecemeal but had the whole of it in one single 'meeting' (mystrical communion) with God. Whatever he said or did in later years was the outcome of this communion. After having received the revelation, Guru Nanak went out to share his message, the truth he had received from God with mankind in general. He visited almost every centre of pilgrimage on an otherwise holy place that fell on his way and met the holy men there notwithstanding their religious affiliations. He shared his message with whomsoever he came in contact, but never forced anyone to agree to his viewpoint. He held discourses with them, listening to their point of view (*kichhu suniai*) and then presenting his own (*kichhu kahiai*). Many people were convinced of the veracity of the truth that Guru Nanak preached and they accepted his beliefs and practices.

The Guru knit together such followers into various congregations asking them to meet daily or at regular intervals and sing praises of the Lord – God. The meeting – place of such *sangats* or congregations came to be called *dharamsala* which later on developed into the modern-day *gurdwara*. Sikhism makes no distinction between individual/private and communal/public prayer; neither of them is considered better or more effective than the other. However, the Sikh preference for the latter is only to provide the devotees an occasion and a platform to sit and pray together. This was necessary to eradicate the malady of inequality and untouchability so deep rooted in contemporary Indian society. After completing his preaching odysseys, Guru Nanak settled down at Kartarpur (now in Pakistan) where he worked in his fields to earn his living, gathered around him a congregation which would sing eulogies of God and also work in the fields for their living. This was a typical example of an ideal Sikh way of life- *nam*

japna (remembering Name Divine), *kirat karna* (doing honest labour with one's own hands) and *wand chhakna* (sharing with others whatever one earns through one's honest labours). Guru Nanak, having felt the need to provide a consistency and stamina to the movement he had initiated, appointed a successor to his mission. The successor was Bhai Lahina, renamed Angad (*angad* in Punjabi means of one's own *ang* or limb of one's body). Thus, (Guru) Angad became the second Nanak; 'Guru Nanak imparted his light to Lahina by changing his form,' says Bhai Gurdas. This succession, illustrated with the help of the image of a candle being lit with another one, continued nine times, until Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Arjan Dev, whose personality and vision form the contents of the following pages of the book, was the fifth in the line of succession.

The following pages have been an humble attempt at sketching out a brief but comprehensive portrait of the personality and vision of Guru Arjan. The opening chapter begins with an overview of the historical context and cultural milieu of the north-west of India, setting of stage for the arrival of Guru Arjan on the scene. It touches upon the socio-political and religious situation in India of those days. It also refers briefly to the chains of invasions by the Arabs, Turks and Afghans in succession and the encounter between Islam and Hinduism. Both these religions represented two mutually exclusive and in several ways contradictory culture-forms thus causing a lot of distrust and disharmony in social relations.

The second chapter on the concept and meaning of the Guru aims at defining the concept and role of the Guru in Sikh faith and tradition. The concept of Guru is central to the Sikh thought: the word *Sikh* implies a disciple which calls for the presence of the Guru. The Sikhs are thus deeply attached to their Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, and the Guru Granth Sahib. The Sikh tradition believes the Guru to have become incarnate in Word, and this makes the latter the centre of focus in Sikhism. This is something unlike the Christian belief wherein Word becomes incarnate in the person of Jesus, thus making him the focus of the Christian faith. The Sikh tradition also believes in the spiritual oneness of the Gurus; they were all one in spirit though different to body. Guru in Sikhism does not take man to a position of higher spirituality as if by miracle or on a crutch; he simply guides and

shows seekers the path, but the seeker has to tread the path himself. An effort has also been made to explain the inter-relationship between God (source of revelation), Guru (the medium through which revelation is communicated to mankind) and Word (the message, the revelation).

The third chapter is the biography of Guru Arjan, beginning with his ancestry and childhood and going on to narrate the challenges faced by the Guru during his lifetime both before and after his spiritual succession. Though not much authentic information about the Guru's life is available yet we have tried to construct a viable biographical sketch of the Guru. Since the Guru's life can only be constructed on the basis of information coming from some early Sikh chronicles, there have been dates and issues connected with the Guru's life where there is no consensus among scholars. We have here tried to present the different views without prejudging them. Herein we have also touched upon briefly the major projects undertaken and completed by the Guru including the founding of certain towns, erection of the Harimander, compilation of the scripture, digging of wells and pools, etc.

Guru Arjan Dev was a poet of great merit, musicologist with deep understanding of *ragas*, meticulous editor with a eye for perfection and a philosopher and mystic. The fourth chapter deals with the poetic output of the Guru and the world-view that emerges from it. This details the major compositions of the Guru, especially the more important longer ones wherein we have tried to appreciate their poetic grandeur and highlight their metaphysical importance. No doubt, all the original doctrines and concepts of the Sikh faith were articulated by the founder of the faith, but this in no way belittles the contribution of the following Gurus who contributed a lot in providing an exposition and explanation of these concepts and doctrines. The contribution of Guru Arjan in this regard is immense.

The Sikh movement has been a revolution aimed at transforming the society by eradicating falsehood and hypocrisy, inequality and injustice, oppression and exploitation. It endeavored at erecting a social order wherein prevailed the values of equality and love, compassion and philanthropy, truth and righteousness. The task was enviable but fraught with challenges. Guru Arjan took up the challenge, struggled and strived and became the first martyr in the history of Indian religions. The fifth chapter deals

with the concept of martyrdom in Sikhism as well as the circumstances leading to the Guru's martyrdom. The latter had a deep impact on the course of Sikh history which thereafter developed a long tradition of martyrdom. It proved to be a turning point in the transformation of the Indian community from a subdued and humiliated nation into an independent and self-respecting people. The sparrows became capable of killing the hawks, as tradition holds, by the time of Guru Gobind Singh.

A very significant issue in the history of religions has always been the manner in which a spiritual preceptor articulates a new religious vision and is in turn shaped over the years by pre-existing mythic ideals which are embedded in the prevailing religious culture. The present booklet is also an attempt to study the emergence of the Sikh faith in an otherwise oppressed and etherised Indian society and discuss the circumstances in which Guru Arjan appeared on the scene, analyse the challenges he had to face during his lifetime, highlight his contribution in the transformation of society, and the suffering he had to undergo and the ultimate sacrifice he had to make. In the process, the book refers briefly to the contemporary historical milieu, the flaws the Guru found in the prevailing socio-religious situation, his vision at rectifying or removing these flaws so as to transform this world into Sach Khand or the realm of truth, and the price he had to pay for this.

Chapter I **THE HISTORICAL MILIEU**

I

It has been a known fact of history that the north-west of India, the region where Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539), the founder of the Sikh faith, was born, faced wave upon wave of nomadic tribes and other invading armies from across Central Asia and regions in the west. These invaders, who successively forced their way into India, included the Persians, Greeks, Parthians, Scythians, Kushans and Huns, and they all came in an unending sequence. These invading hosts came from completely alien lands and cultures, created temporary upheavals but ultimately all of these got imperceptibly sucked into the all-absorbing Hindu social order. Even the Greeks who boasted of a superior civilization were pejoratively called Yavanas, i.e. barbarians, by the native Hindus, and the philosophical Hinduism refused to accept any impact of the Hellenistic ideals of humanism, beauty and art peculiar to the Greek civilization.

It was during the first half of the seventh century that Islam made the first contact with India. It was around this time that some Muslim Arabs reached the southern peninsula as traders travelling through sea. That was the time when the Arabs were, with the might of their sword, subduing many countries including Persia (AD 670) and Spain (AD 711). In the north-west of India, they first conquered Sind (AD 711) defeating Raja Dahir and extended their sway to Multan. Although any further progress was halted by the local Hindu chieftains, yet Sind remained under Arab rule for about three centuries. However, this Arab-Indian contact left behind significant cultural impact and Indo-Arab contacts increased in the fields of learning and science as the Barmakides, converts from Buddhism, acquired ministerial authority under the Abbasid Khalifa. Many Indian (Hindu) physicians and scholars are said to have been offered important assignments in Baghdad and elsewhere. Similarly, several Arab

scholars also came over to India, especially to the centres of Muslim theology in Sind and Multan.

By the tenth century, the Turkic Muslims began to invade India. The Afghan Turks broke away from the Baghdad Khilafat and set up their own autonomous rule in Ghazni. Soon they subdued the Brahmin dynasty which had ruled parts of Afghanistan and north-west of Punjab for the last many years. The Ghaznavids, a dynasty from eastern Afghanistan, began a series of raids into northwestern India at the end of the tenth century. Mahmud of Ghazni, the most notable ruler of the dynasty, opened the mountain route to raid India, and beginning with his first invasion in 998 he led seventeen expeditions against India. However, the repeated invasions by Mahmud were essentially plundering raids with no desire or attempt at permanent conquest. This was, no doubt, mixed with the zeal to chastise the 'infidels' of India, by killing them en masse, defiling and destroying their places of worship and carrying away their women and children. But it took about another century and a half for the Muslim rule to be established in almost the whole of north India. It was one of the successors to Mahmud's dismembered empire, the Muslim conqueror, Muhammad of Gaur, who began his conquest of India in 1175 and within about twenty years, he had conquered the whole of north India. After Gaur's death in 1206, one of his generals, Qutb ud-Din Aibak, occupied Delhi and established the Muslim rule in India. Thus, Punjab hereafter became part of the Delhi Sultanate.

The following three centuries saw several successive Muslim dynasties rule over Delhi - the Khiljis, the Tughlaqs, the Sayyids and the Lodhis. Under the Sayyids the Delhi Sultanate shrank to virtually nothing. The Lodhi dynasty of Afghan origin (1451-1526) revived the rule of Delhi over much of India. During these about five centuries of Muslim rule over India, many Indians became converts to Islam. The north-west of India including the Punjab remained part of the Delhi Sultanate under the Mughal rule for a long period of about five hundred years, and as a result of this a great majority of people here became Muslims. Many Muslims married Hindu women and many Hindus otherwise got converted to Islam. Interestingly, the area now forming Bangladesh was once dominated by the Buddhists who converted to Islam during this period.

However, the Sultanate kings in general were far from tolerant, even despising their non-Muslim subjects. Their attitude was harsh

and discriminatory against their non-Muslim subjects, yet some Hindus occupied official positions in the court in Delhi and in other towns and villages throughout the empire. As it is, non-Muslims had to be appointed to fill the junior revenue posts at the village level for the simple reason that there were not enough educated and otherwise qualified Muslims to fill such a vast cadre. There was almost no other meeting point between the two communities, conversions and matrimony being the only other factors which somewhat diluted religious and social exclusivism. Hasan Nizami Nishapuri's *Taj ul-Maazir*, Minhaj us-Saraj's *Tabqat-I-Nasiri*, Amir Khusrau's *Tawarikh-I-Alai* or *Khazainat ul-Futuh* and Abdullah Wassar's *Tazjivat ul-Asar* are full of accounts of excesses and repression committed by the Delhi Sultans. En mass killing of non-Muslims, defiling and destroying their places of worship and carrying away their women and children were common occurrences.

It was during the reign of King Ibrahim of the Lodhi dynasty that Babar (1483-1530), the Mughal ruler originally of Farghana in Central Asia and then of Kabul, turned his eyes towards India after having lost his ancestral possessions in the Central Asia. In fact, it was in 1504 that he came in touch with India whose wealth was a standing temptation: that was the year when he took over Kabul. His first exploratory expedition took place in early 1505, followed by invasions in 1517 and then 1519 when he advanced up to Peshawar. Next year he came again, crossed the Indus and conquering Sialkot marched into Eminabad which suffered the most at the hands of the invading armies. The town was taken, the garrison put to sword and there was much killing and looting. He came again in 1523-24 and ransacked even Lahore. This time he entered Punjab on the invitation of the governor of Punjab (Daulat Khan Lodhi) and 'Alam Khan (an uncle of the Delhi king, Ibrahim Lodhi), but had to return home under pressure from Balkh. However, he came back again next year. Unlike in the past when his motive was simply to molest and loot, this time he had other designs in mind. He faced the Delhi king, Ibrahim Lodhi, at Panipat, defeated him and settled down as a conqueror and ruler of Delhi. Babar died on 26 December 1530, and he was succeeded by his son, Humayun. But he was soon defeated by the Bihar-based Sher Khan Sur only to regain his possessions in 1555 after a gap of about fifteen years.

II

Politically, India was ruled by the Lodhi dynasty, the king being Ibrahim Lodhi, at the time Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh faith, was born. Ibrahim Lodhi, like most other rulers of the Sultanate, was deeply committed to the Islamic *shari'at* laws and was rather severe in his treatment of his non-Muslim subjects. He made a point of destroying all Hindu temples and other places of worship. However, most of the rulers had to adopt a deliberately hostile policy towards their non-Muslim subjects simply to placate their theocratic advisers. Of course, with the passage of time a sense of expediency on the part of rulers and the compulsions of neighbourly living among the common man had begun to dawn, but there was still no perceptible or significant relaxation in the barriers between the two communities. Guru Nanak, who had just set out on his preaching odysseys after having received revelation, was an eye-witness, at Eminabad, to the death and destruction caused in the wake of Babar's invasion. He renders, in his hymns collectively known as "Babar Vani" (Babar's Sway), the agony of the situation with accents of deep power and protest. These hymns, unlike any other work in the entire Indian literature of the period, are highly critical of the corrupt and tyrannical rule typified by the Lodhis. The Guru condemns them for their unjust and oppressive, exclusivistic and exploitative policies as well as for their inability to defend their subjects. At the same time, he compares the invading hordes from Khurasan with a marriage party of sin and also complains to God for the misery perpetrated at the innocent and powerless by the powerful and mighty. In spite of all the suffering and death caused by the invasions of Babar, Guru Nanak sees him as an unwitting instrument of the divine Will to punish the Lodhis for having violated the laws of God.

Referring to the contemporary rulers, Guru Nanak in his hymns calls them "cruel man-eaters". He refers to the contemporary situation as one where greed, sin and falsehood reigned supreme, and where welfare of the common man was nobody's concern. One could easily have an inkling of the plight of the masses when they are governed by unjust rulers and what is worse even the judiciary prefers to be partial on the side of the ruling class. What an eighteenth century English poet says in an absolutely different socio-political context seems just an echo of what Guru Nanak had said in one of his hymns much earlier.

Alexander Pope (1688-1744), while criticising the unjust behaviour of those who are supposed to provide justice, says: The hungry judges soon the sentence sign/And wretches hang that Jury-men may dine.” Guru Nanak also found the courts of justice in his contemporary society full of favouritism and corruption. He said elsewhere that “the qazi fouls his justice by corruption.” The ruling class led a life of voluptuous ease and irresponsibility, of falsehood and hypocrisy.

Emperor Muhammad Jalal ud-Din Akbar (1542-1605), who succeeded Humayun to the Delhi throne, not only consolidated his power but also took some effective steps to improve the social and economic life of the people. His revenue reforms and his liberal religious policy earned him much name and appreciation. He passed decrees putting to an end various laws discriminatory against the non-Muslims and curbed the power of Muslim theocracy. His genuine interest in the study of different religions of the world helped him develop a catholic and pluralist attitude. He built an *'ibadatkhana* or the house of worship where learned men of all religions assembled and held discussions on various theological issues. His pluralistic views prompted him to promulgate a new eclectic faith which he named Din-I-Ilahi: he hoped that all his subjects would veer round to the ideology of this new faith, but it is a different story that it did not happen.

When Akbar was crowned king in 1556, the'nascant Sikh faith was led by Guru Amar Das ((1479-1574), the third successive Guru or spiritual preceptor of the Sikh faith, who had taken over from Guru Angad Dev after the latter's demise in 1552. The Sikh chronicles refer to Akbar's amicable relations with Guru Amar Das. They also allude to Akbar's visit to Goindval, the seat of the Guru, where he went to meet the Guru. It is also said that by that time the Guru had proclaimed that anybody wanting to see him must first partake of food in the Guru ka Langar, or the community kitchen. These chronicles also say that Akbar refused to walk on the silks spread out for him on the way he had to walk while going to meet the Guru. He is said to have turned aside the lining with his own hands and preferred to walk barefoot. Akbar's calling on the Guru, his walking barefoot on the ground to go up to the seat of the Guru and his agreeing to partake of food in Guru ka Langar along with other commoners do not imply that he was a follower of the Guru, but it does bring out the Emperor's catholicity

of views, his feelings of respect for the Guru as a holy man or his reverence for a holy many of whatever religious persuasion.

It is also recorded in history that Emperor Akbar also visited Guru Arjan at Goindval on 24 November 1598: the emperor was accompanied by Abul Fazl (1551-1602), the emperor's minister and author of *Akbar-nama*, who was mainly responsible for moulding and shaping the religious policy of the Emperor. This was the time when the peasants of the region suffered hardship as a result of the failure of the last monsoon. The Guru, it is said, narrated to the Emperor the woes of the poor peasants, and the Emperor remitted the annual revenue. According to another source, complaints were proffered to Akbar as he put up in Batala that the scripture of the Sikhs contained references derogatory to Islam, with the obvious intention to harm Guru Arjan who had compiled the Holy Book. The Guru was summoned, but he sent Bhai Gurdas and Baba Buddha along with the Holy Volume. As they reached the Emperor's court at Batala, they were asked to open the scripture at random and read the hymn from the spot pointed out by the Emperor. They were also asked to read some more hymns from other pages. However, all the hymns pointed out were in praise of God. Akbar dismissed the complaints and rather honoured Bhai Gurdas and Baba Buddha and made an offering to the Holy Volume as well.

Akbar died in 1605 when Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606) was leading the Sikh movement : he had taken over after the passing away in 1581 of Guru Ram Das, the fourth Guru of the Sikh faith. By this time the Sikh faith had acquired its own scripture, now known as the Guru Granth Sahib; its central place of worship and pilgrimage, the *sanctum sanctorum*, the Harimandar at Amritsar; its own metaphysics based on the doctrines articulated by Guru Nanak and later enunciated and explained by other Gurus; and its own institutions in the form of *sangat* and *pangat*, its own practices like *daswandh* or tithe and *seva* or selfless service. The strong scriptural, doctrinal and organizational base transformed the Sikh movement into a potential force for bringing about a cultural and social revolution in the Punjab. The Sikhs lived their spiritual doctrines and social ideals in their practical social life. The cohesive administration first through pious and selfless *manjidars* and then *masands* only added to its potential taking the form of practice. The tithe paid voluntarily by all Sikhs to meet expenses for the

completion of ventures of common weal put the movement on a stable economic base. It was commonly said during those days that one might delay or forego payment of tax to the state but a Sikh would readily pay tithe to his Guru. The growing popularity of the Sikh movement, its stable socio-economic base and the Sikh stress on leading a life of self-dignity and help others in this regard made the Mughal government apprehensive of the Sikh movement considering it a state within a state.

After Emperor Jahangir (1569-1627) ascended the throne of Delhi following the death of Akbar in 1605, the government attitude towards the Gurus and the Sikhs underwent a drastic change. If Akbar was known for his liberal religious policy and his catholic attitude toward other religions, pendulum swung toward bigotry and intolerance, coercion and oppression immediately after him. There was an orthodox section among his courtiers who, under the influence of people like Shaikh Ahmad of Sirhind (d. 1624), worked concertedly for the reversion of Akbar's policy of religious neutrality: Shaikh Ahmad belonged to the Naqashbandi order of the Sufis. If Akbar's policy had resulted in his amicable relations with the Gurus, the government's attitude now became obviously hostile after Jahangir's taking over. A man of many natural abilities and a great lover of art and literature, Jahangir the emperor accepted the influence of this orthodox section among his courtiers, and it was this hostile attitude of the emperor which ultimately led first to the arrest and execution of Guru Arjan and then the imprisonment of his son and successor, Guru Hargobind.

The martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675), the ninth Guru of the Sikh faith, under the orders of Emperor Aurangzib and the struggle waged by Guru Gobind Singh and the following suffering he and his family went through subsequently were all the consequences of the religious policy of intolerance and exclusivism now started by Jahangir and followed by Shah Jahan and then Aurangzib. Though Aurangzib had nothing personal against Guru Tegh Bahadur, yet both of them stood clearly for ideals in stark opposition to each other - the former for religious exclusivism and the latter for the freedom of conscience. The severe persecution that the community went through during the eighteenth century when prices were fixed on their heads and efforts were made to exterminate them is also indicative of the Sikh stance against religious intolerance and exclusivism.

III

Guru Nanak inherited a society honeycombed with racial arrogance, social exclusiveness and superstitious of diverse kinds. Religion in such a set up could hardly be anything but a formal and shapeless system of arid beliefs and lifeless rituals, thereby losing almost completely its relevance to the needs of contemporary society. Instead of performing the three-dimensional functions of providing for man's relationship to God, his relationship to fellow human beings, and his relationship to himself, his conscience which are required of all the religions, religion in medieval India found itself garbled beneath the complicated web of rituals and completely divorced from its social praxis. It was in such a cataleptic society that Guru Nanak lived and restored religion to its lost freshness and vitality, making it relevant and useful to the needs of contemporary society.

The social scene in medieval India was dominated by two very vital yet mutually exclusive and in several ways contradictory culture-forms represented by Hinduism and Islam: Jainism and Buddhism, two other religions of Indian origin belonging to the *sramanic* tradition, were numerically a very insignificant minority. These two streams had been running their parallel course ever since the first Muslim contact with India in the 8th century. The invaders brought with them the enthusiasm of a newly acquired religious faith and an outlook completely different from that of the native Hindus on many fundamental points. The prevalent Hinduism at that time was polytheistic, iconographic and ascetical whereas Islam was monotheistic, iconoclastic and socially motivated and practical. The former was tolerant in its religious attitude accepting several sects with many different and even contradictory doctrines as its own, but had developed a rigidly corseted social structure. The latter, on the other hand, had a liberal social system but was bigoted and fanatical in its religious belief. The reign of Ibrahim Lodhi who was a contemporary of Guru Nanak has been described as the "most severe and inquisitorial" in its treatment of the non-Muslims subjects.

The Hindu society was hierarchically divided on caste lines, and the lowest of them all, called *sudras* or outcastes, lived an almost ostracized life and their houses were invariably on the outskirts of the other habitations. They were debarred from entering a place of worship and listening to a religious discourse.

There was no intercourse between them and the so-called 'twice-born' and other higher castes. The mere shadow of a *sudra* was considered polluting by a Brahmin. The Bhakti movement, a kind of reform movement within Hinduism, did criticise the practice of human inequality and the evil of untouchability, but since they did not reject the theological basis of this ideology, the evil practice could not be wiped out. However, the fact that many of the protagonists of the Bhakti movement belonged to the so-called lower castes brought about a change in the mindset of people. Now the non-Brahmins with personal spiritual experience began to earn respect as spiritual teachers, though there were also instances of the Brahmin opposition to it.

Besides these outcastes and other low-caste people, womankind was also discriminated against and was not given a status of equality with man in the medieval Indian society. Not only in India but even in Europe, she was given, to put it in the words of the famous author and playwright Shakespeare, the other name of frailty. In that male-dominated society, even the birth of a female child was considered inauspicious and the cases of female infanticide were not uncommon. The Indian woman of the time of Guru Nanak was completely denied an independent personality of her own. Female infanticide, child marriage, malnutrition and *sati* were some of the evils resulting from this *weltanschauung*. She was regarded as intrinsically evil, spiritually contaminated, poisoning by her very presence and an obstacle to salvation. The law book of Manu, the *Manusmriti*, so depicts the licentiousness and grossly sensual character of woman that it cannot be discussed without violating decency and modesty. The cumulative effect of such ignominious practices laid a heavy burden of guilt on the Hindu woman and she expiated her 'sins' by an abject submission to the dictates of orthodoxy. Her husband was a god to her even if, as says the *Padma Purana*, he was aged, infirm, debauched, offensive, a drunkard, a gambler, a frequenter of places of ill-repute, living in open sin with other woman and destitute of honour. Since she was denied an independent entity, she committed self-immolation at the pyre of her dead husband. The situation was not much different in other religions. For example, certain sects in Jainism even still hold that women must be reborn in male form before attaining *moksa*. Similarly, a Jain nun or *sadhvi* however old and senior must bow to the male *Sadhu* however young and junior.

Although some social reformers did realize that the Hindu culture has erred on the side of excessive subordination of the wife to her husband yet her plight did not materially change for the better. Male chauvinism continues in Indian society even today and majority of women are still as timid as the cow. The sense of liberation which the Western woman seems to enjoy today is too modern a phenomenon and still a dream for an ordinary Indian woman. Guru Nanak's was perhaps the first voice against this discrimination. He proclaimed that woman is not an evil or a seductress, but the mother of mankind. Woman appears a seductress to one who himself is a seducer. Sikh Gurus have advised man to look at a beautiful woman as if she were a mother, sister or daughter to him. The Sikh *rahitnamas* or the code of conduct, lay equal obligation on both men and women as regards the virtue or chastity or fidelity. Adultery, stated in Sikhism to be one of the five serious evils, must be desisted from by every one, including both man and woman, and not even the king can be exempted.

The religious scene in medieval Indian society was also not very encouraging: almost all the religions of Indian origin (Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism apart from various sects and sub-sects) considered this world mere *maya* and thus a hindrance in the spiritual progression of man. Therefore, renunciation of the world and family life was considered obligatory if one wanted to attain salvation. As a natural consequence of this, all enlightened beings became indifferent to the moral and ethical life of man. Bhai Gurdas also refers to this kind of situation when, in one of his *vars*, he laments the fact of the *siddhas*' (enlightened) beings renunciation of world in favour of a life in the mountains and forests because in that situation there remained nobody to take care of the moral and ethical health of society. The result was utter degeneration in the social, political and religious affairs. Complete lack of guts and values on the part of common man was somewhat like T.S. Eliot's 'patient etherised upon a table': it gave rise to a situation wherein exploitation and hypocritical behaviour became the order of the day. As says Guru Nanak, 'it was an age of falsehood and utter degeneration: avarice and sin were the kings and the minister and falsehood their chief. Lust was the advisor and so they all confabulate.'

Although sacrifice as a religious ritual had almost disappeared

by the time of Guru Nanak yet the ideas of purification and defilement had been borrowed from earlier religious practices and refined and extended to several aspects of life. The Brahmins did not attach much importance to the inner purity but instead performed the ritual of keeping their hearth clean. As Guru Nanak says in one of his hymns, these Brahmins drew a line around their cooking place so as to keep it free from all influences of pollution and defilement while their hearts were full of impurity as they still harboured the four vices in their hearts. These Brahmins also carried this concept of purification and defilement to many other aspects of life as well. A woman was called defiled under certain circumstances. The whole house was considered defiled in which a child was born, outsiders could not enter that house for a certain length of time. Certain days were auspicious whereas others were declared inauspicious. This kind of attitude gave rise to false temple and hypocritical behaviour which were witnessed in the Hindus who practised their Hindu rituals secretly within the confines of their home but donned the Muslim garb and followed the Muslim practices outside in the society.

No doubt, under the Turks and the Mughals, Hindus and Muslims happened to live in isolation of each other, but around the 14th century we perceive small symptoms of the desire for religious co-existence trying to assert itself as against the dominant culture of distrust and disharmony, intolerance and oppression that prevailed. On the one hand, certain Hindu Bhaktas like Ramanand and Kabir raised their banner of revolt against the orthodoxy of religion and favouring catholicity and equality in religious and social life. It is difficult to say whether the Muslim presence, the presence of a religion different from and at certain points opposite to Hinduism encouraged this trend or it was a natural reaction to a given historical situation or it was part of a world-wide phenomenon of upward social mobilization of the subaltern classes. The religious *weltanschauung* they tried to evolve had a universal appeal, was more a way of life than being a set of some arid and lifeless rituals. On the other hand, the Muslim missionaries and Sufis who preached in the Indian countryside also presented to the masses a somewhat liberal view of Islam. Unlike some of the Muslim rulers who tried forcible conversion, these holy men gave out the message of love and attracted following cutting across religious barriers .

A positive outcome of both these currents was the implicit stepping down by Hinduism and Islam from their respective citadels of orthodoxy to find out a few meeting points, notwithstanding the doctrinal differences between the two traditions they represented. The ensuing interaction between the two gave a new dimension to the religious life of the country, taking religion as something above sectarian level. Consequently, the holy men coming from both the Hindu and Muslim traditions attracted a mixed following coming from different religious backgrounds. All this helped in the creation of an environment in which one could think of the universality of the essential values of religion, religious catholicism spiritual unity and ethnical equality of mankind, universal Fatherhood of God and universal brotherhood of mankind. It was in this socio-religious situation that Guru Nanak was born.

IV

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, was born in the month of Vaisakh of AD 1469 at Talwandi Rai Bhoi, now called Nanakana Sahib in Pakistan. He got married and had two sons. He was a precocious child with a unique intellectual and mystical genius. However, his mind was not in acquiring the learning of the mundane world, rather he was ever absorbed in God. He was at Sultanpur when he had had the revelation and he took out four preaching odysseys to different parts of India and outside to share that revelation with mankind in general. Wherever he went, he established *sangats* (holy congregations) and *dharamsalas* (places for congregation). He asked his followers to congregate at specific intervals or at any time in the *dharamsalas* and sing (*kirtan*) eulogies of God. Sikhism makes no distinction between individual (private) and collective/communal (public) prayer: neither of them is better or more effective than the other. However, the Sikh preference for the latter is only to provide the devotees an occasion and a platform to sit and pray together. This was necessary to eradicate the malady of caste inequality and untouchability so deeply ingrained in contemporary Indian society.

Guru Nanak preached through precept and practice the unity of Reality and spiritual unity of mankind. According to him, God is a non-dual dynamic Reality: He is one, and He is the creator of the entire manifest phenomena and being creator He is also immanent in the entire creation. This doctrine leads to the Sikh

view of the Fatherhood of God and universal brotherhood of mankind. The metaphysical doctrine of the oneness of God becomes the *vis-a-tergo* for the spiritual unity and ethnic equality of mankind. Birth in a particular caste or family does not make one better or higher than the other: it is the deeds done by man during his lifetime in this world which make him better or worse than the others. Guru Nanak declared truthful life higher than anything else, higher than even Truth. Hypocrisy and falsehood are severely condemned. He wanted man to lead a life given to honesty and righteousness, to *kirat karna* (doing honest labour), *nam japna* (remembering the Name Divine) and *wand chhakna* (sharing with the needy what one earns with the sweat of one's brow), to altruism and truthful behaviour, and to love and service of mankind.

Since Guru Nanak wanted to give consistency and stamina to the movement he had initiated, he appointed a successor to his mission. The successor was Bhai Lahina, renamed Angad, i.e. the *ang* or limb of his own body. Thus, Angad became the second Nanak. "Guru nanak imparted his light to Lahina by changing his form," says Bhai Gurdas. This idea of oneness, in spirit, of the Gurus despite their bodily vestures being different has also been reiterated by Satta and Balwand whose *Var* is included in the Sikh scripture. This process of succession was repeated successively until the installation of the tenth spiritual preceptor, Guru Gobind Singh, who just before his demise put an end to the institution of person-Gurus and declared the scripture to be the Guru Eternal for the Sikhs. Guru Angad continued the work begun by the founder of the faith. He also standardised the Gurmukhi script and introduced it for writing down hymns of his own as well as of his predecessor. He is also said to have prepared the first biography of Guru Nanak. He used to hold regular wrestling bouts as part of his evening congregations, thereby stressing alongside spiritual progress the physical well-being of his followers and others.

Guru Amar Das (1479-1574), the third Guru of the Sikh faith, continued further the work initiated by his predecessors. Among other things, he took special care to preserve the hymns received from his predecessor besides adding his own to them. He also created a well organized ecclesiastical system and set up twenty-two *manjis* or dioceses to facilitate the work of preaching

the Sikh tenets to people in far off areas: *melis* or *manjidars* were appointed to these dioceses who deputized for the Guru in their respective areas. He took steps to put into practice the precepts taught by them and the institution of *langar* or community kitchen was one such step. He also commanded his followers to congregate at Goindwal, his headquarters, on Maghi, Diwali and Vaisakhi days. Although the process of the Sikh community acquiring a separate and distinct identity, hastened and sharpened as it was by their persecution, was gradual, yet this command by the Guru was perhaps the first step in this direction.

This process of consolidating the faith and tradition was continued by the fourth Guru, Ram Das (1534-1581). He founded the modern-day township of Amritsar on a piece of land which he had purchased in AD 1577 from the farmers of village Tung. In fact, he got a tank, called *amritsar* (the tank or *sar* of nectar of *amrit*), dug and a flourishing township came up around it. It was this name of the tank which later on transferred itself to the town, earlier named Chak Ramdas or Ramdaspur. It has since become one of the most important places in Sikh tradition. This pulsating city has since been a rallying ground for the Sikhs and their activities. Guru Ram Das strengthened the institution of *langar* and made it essentially a people's organization, wholly dependent on the charity and donations of the devotees. He put the missionary system on a still more sound footing. The *manjis* and *melis* were now replaced by the *masands* so as to make the system more efficient. The word *masand* is a Punjabized form of the Persian word *masnad* which was used for high dignitaries during the Afghan rule. These *masands* preached the Gurus' Word in their respective areas, settled disputes among the Sikhs and advised them on personal matters, and collected offerings from the devotees on behalf of the Guru which they deposited with the Guru twice an year - on Diwali and Vaisakhi days. As the *amritsar* tank was being dug, the Guru advised his followers to put in physical labour. The aim was to inculcate among them the value of dignity of labour and voluntary work. In fact, it was during his pontificate that the Sikh virtues of *kirat karna*, *nam japna* and *wand chhakna* were highly stressed and nurtured. He prescribed the routine of a Sikh and advised him to strive for inner devotion, do honest labour and share food with the needy.

Guru Ram Das passed away in 1581 and just before his demise

he appointed his son, Arjan Dev, to succeed him in the spiritual office. As we shall see in the following pages, the work of the first four Gurus was preparatory and it assumed a more definitive form in the hands of Guru Arjan Dev. Later Gurus substantiated the principles manifested in the life of Guru Arjan Dev who thus marked a central point in the evolution of the Sikh faith and tradition.

Chapter II GURU IN SIKHISM

I

The word *guru* has been in vogue in the Indian religious traditions since ancient times. According to the *Aiteraya Upanishad*, it implies the one who restrains or removes ignorance: the word *gu* implies darkness and *ru* implies one who restrains or removes it. The Sanskrit-English dictionary of Monier-Williams says that the word *guru*, as a noun, stands for a spiritual parent or preceptor, author of a *mantra*, preceptor of the gods. Some other scholars have also tried to explain the word by saying that *gur* means to lift, hurt, kill or eat, and thus the word *guru* is a person who lifts up a disciple by killing, destroying or removing his ignorance. Thus, the word *guru* could, broadly speaking, be taken to mean as the teacher or preceptor who delivers those who accept his teaching and discipline from darkness to enlightenment, from the web of transmigration to *mukti* or liberation, from the pangs of suffering to eternal bliss. The term has been used in the Indian religious tradition in this sense for quite a long time.

In the ancient Hindu tradition, the Brahmins were the first to be called *gurus* because they taught Vedic knowledge to the youth of the higher three of the four *varnas* into which the Hindu society was divided: the *Manusmriti* says that a Brahmin has the right to study as well as teach the Vedas whereas the Kshatris (Khatris, in Punjabi) and Vaishyas have only the right to study them. Earlier the initiate went to the Brahman *guru*, studied Vedas and other scriptural literature under his care and served him for several years, but by medieval times when Sikhism originated the situation had undergone a significant change: now the role of the Brahmin *guru* was limited only to the *upanayam* or the sacred thread ceremony and for this the former went to the house of the latter to perform the ceremony. Thus, the duties of the Brahmin were limited to the performance of certain ceremonies and get material benefits in lieu of that. Bhai Gurdas in one of his *vars* also refers to this degenerated social scenario in which the teacher goes to

the house of the taught for the sake of material gains. Along side the tradition of the Brahmin *guru*, Hinduism also saw the growth and development of another tradition of personal spiritual experience. People who were not Brahmins but were enlightened and had the ability to help others attain enlightenment happened to be highly respected in the Hindu society. There have been several instances in Indian history when people with personal spiritual experience, who were not members of the Brahmin *varna*, claimed a right to teach on the basis of their spiritual experience. Gautama Buddha, Lord Mahavira and many holy men coming from the Bhakti movement belong to this category. Guru Nanak and other Gurus of the Sikh faith can also be counted in this group of persons.

II

In the Sikh tradition, Guru stands as much for the human teacher or preceptor as for the Divine, and also for the revelation (Word) as it came from Him, and we find the word used in all these senses. However, this identification of the Guru with God is not the identification of the person of the Guru with God, but Guru conceived as *sabda* or word as revealed by Him. As a human preceptor, Guru in Sikh tradition means the ten spiritual preceptors, from Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539) to Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708); no other person however pious or enlightened can claim or be accepted as such. Thereafter, it has been the *bani* uttered by the Gurus or the Word which has been called and acknowledged as Guru. It is the Gurus' Word, believed to be divine revelation, which leads man on the way to *mukti*. Since the Word as communicated by the ten spiritual preceptors and as contained in the scripture is Divine, the Sikh tradition sometimes uses the words God (the source of the Word or revelation), the Word (divine message) and Guru (the instrument used by the Divine to communicate that message to mankind) as synonyms. That is why Guru in Sikhism stands for the human teacher or preceptor, for the Divine and also for Word (revelatory word coming from God), and we find that the Sikh scriptural literature has used the word in all these senses.

The Guru in Sikh tradition is neither God nor God's incarnation. There have been repeated references in the scripture to the effect that God never incarnates in human or any other form: the idea of divine incarnation stands outrightly rejected in Sikh faith and

tradition. Guru Arjan Dev, in one of his hymns, states that all the gods, goddesses and incarnations are the creation of God. The Lord God has created and annihilated millions of Brahmas and Visnus and Sivas (GGS, V, 1156) The Absolute One is fathomless, and neither the Vedas nor Brahma nor any of the incarnations can comprehend Him in His entirety (GGS, V, 894). Guru Gobind Singh, in his autobiographical *Bachitra Natak* (VI.32), is quite unequivocal as he asks his followers that he be not treated or taken as God: he who calls him God must suffer the pangs of hell, he warns. Rather Guru Gobind Singh calls himself the son and slave of God. Obviously, this idea of God's son must not be confused with the Christian view of Jesus being the son of God. The Sikh tradition takes the Gurus to be perfectly realized souls whom God selected as His instruments so as to communicate His Word to mankind in general. It is through them that God's word or revelation enters human history because it is through them that God's word is revealed. In other words, Guru is the voice of God, God's self-revelation in mundane language. He is, no doubt, a vital link in man's spiritual progress, but he only shows man the way: he is only the exemplar and the guide, but the man has to tread the path himself. In fact, the scripture reiterates that the guidance of the Guru is so essential that no spiritual gain can come without it. But at the same time it makes clear that he is not an intercessor and, as such, does not take the disciple to a higher stage of spirituality as if on crutches or through miracle.

In the Sikh tradition, it is believed that the body of the Guru has been the repository of the Light Divine. This body has been the medium for the articulation of the Divine Word or the revelation as it came from God. So this body is worthy of reverence, but what deserves a devotee's worship is the Word or the divine Word. That is why in Sikhism the Guru is taken as an object of veneration but not as a deity to worship. The historical Guru or the person-Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, were the central point of focus for the congregations and the living examples of the truth they happened to bring to light through the divine revelation. They received the divine message, articulated it and communicated it to mankind in mundane language and they themselves lived up to the message they imparted to others. But in the final analysis of real importance to us all is the Word coming through them.

To understand the true nature of the Guru in Sikhism, a special figure is employed to describe the transference of the office of Guru. The Guruship passes from one Guru to the other as one candle lights another. The metaphor has two connotations: one, the real and true Guru is God who is the source of all light (knowledge or *jnana*). Second, Guru is not to be confused with the human form, i.e. the unlit body: it is not the body but the light within that is important. The Sikh exegetes have given various connotations to the word Guru, depending on the different etymological interpretations. The most common connotation, accepted in Sikhism has been that Guru is the banisher of darkness (*gu* stands for darkness and *ru* for one who helps in its eradication or removal). It is the guidance and help of the Guru which enlightens one by providing him right knowledge and by removing the darkness of ignorance.

The Guru Granth Sahib, the scripture, is both the result and the foundation of the belief-systems of the Sikh religion. It is the result because it verbalizes the revelation as experienced by the spiritual preceptors of the faith. It is perceived to be the foundation because this revelatory experience, as uttered in mundane language, becomes the permanent point of reference for the creedal articulations of Sikhism. We have used the words 'perceived to be' because the real foundation of the religion is not the scripture as such but the experience as recorded in the scripture: the subtle but very significant difference between the scripture as such and the Word or message as contained therein needs to be kept in mind. Besides, the scripture is also normative as it serves as the basis of the code of conduct and ethics for the followers as well as the bond to keep the community together. The former helps in the creation of a social set-up wherein prevail the values of equality and love, justice and self-respect, compassion and altruism. The latter provides the community a separate and distinct identity. As it is, the scripture is the fount of the entire Sikh spiritual and social thought, a sort of constitution wherein are enshrined the parameters which determine the Sikh way of life as well as means for the establishment of an ideal social structure as envisioned by the Gurus.

Guru Granth Sahib, originally called Pothi or the Adi Granth, was first compiled by Guru Arjan in AD 1604 and it contained the revelatory hymns, called *bani* or *sabd*, of the first five Gurus of

the Sikh faith as well as those of certain holy men coming from the Hindu and Muslim traditions. Later on, Guru Gobind Singh added to these hymns those of his spiritual predecessor, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and just before his demise in 1708, bestowed on it the office of Guru for all times to come. Thereafter the Pothi/Adi Granth came to be called and venerated as the Guru Granth Sahib or the living Guru for the Sikhs. No doubt, the scripture acquired this pontifical status only in 1708, but it was highly venerated even earlier. There have been numerous references within the scripture to the effect that the Word is Guru. Guru Ram Das says that *bani* or Word and Guru are the same - *bani guru guru hai bani vichi bani amritu sare*, GGS, IV, 982. Guru Arjan also makes a very unequivocal statement as he says that *pothi* or the holy volume containing the Word is the abode of God - *pothi pamesar ka thanu* (GGS, V, 1226). There have also been several instances in the Sikh history and tradition indicating deep regard shown to the Word by the person-Gurus.

Here a word about Khalsa is also called for because the Sikh tradition believes that Guru Gobind Singh bestowed the office of Guru on the *granth* (Guru Granth Sahib) and the *panth* (Khalsa Panth). The creation of the Khalsa falls within the essential Sikh religious scheme as pronounced by the founder of the faith. The Sikh tradition believes that Guru Nanak received commandment from God (Nirankari) to redeem humanity by preaching the message of *sabda*. Similarly, Guru Gobind Singh also says in his autobiographical *Bachitra Natak* that he was ordained by Akalpurakh (God) to spread *dharma* and eradicate evil. He began his task with a call to arouse within the humans a sense of commitment - commitment to truth, to God. He made the call on the Vaisakhi day of AD 1699, and the five who came forward to offer their heads to the Guru at the altar of *dharma* did not belong to any particular caste or region. The Guru gave them the *pahul* or baptism of the double-edged sword and these five, called the Five Beloved Ones in Sikh tradition, constituted the nucleus of the Khalsa Panth. Since the word *khalsa*, derived from the Persian language used in the contemporary revenue vocabulary, stood for the crown lands, the word in the Sikh tradition came to mean for those who were directly related to Guru and God, without any intermediary. This oneness of the Khalsa with the Guru is witnessed in the fact that the Guru submitted himself before these Five

Beloved Ones to receive the same *pahul* from them which he had earlier given them, thus earning for himself the unique of epithet of being both the Guru and the disciple at the same time. In his writings also, he has unequivocally declared the Khalsa of being in his own image - *khalsa mero rup hai khas*.

Thus, the creation of Khalsa has a direct bearing on the concept of Guru in Sikhism. Guru Gobind Singh declared that he belongs to the Khalsa and the Khalsa belonged to him. This virtually signalled the merger of the two. The *granth* or the scripture, as compiled by Guru Arjan Dev, remained an object of veneration for almost the whole of seventeenth century. It was believed to be a repository of spiritual knowledge. After the declaration of Guru Gobind Singh that he had merged himself within the brotherhood of the Khalsa, the personal Guruship stood abolished, but the concept of Guru remained intact. The decision of the Guru crystallised into the twin doctrine of Guru Granth and Guru Panth that was also a manifestation of the *miri-piri* doctrine. The Sikh tradition believes that the Word as contained in the Guru Granth Sahib is the spirit incarnate of the ten Gurus whereas the Khalsa Panth is their physical manifestation.

III

So far as the hymns as we find incorporated in the scripture are concerned, Guru Nanak refers to them as *khasam ki bani* or Word as received by him from God and that he conveyed it to mankind as it came to him (GGS, I, 722). Guru Arjan Dev also reiterates the same when he calls it *dhur ki bani* or the Word coming from the Highest (GGS, V, 628). Guru Amar Das refers to this *bani* as the cause of light (knowledge) in this world. This oneness of the Source of Word, the Word and the medium of communicating the Word to mankind stands stressed by all the Gurus, but Guru Ram Das makes it very explicit as he proclaims on the one hand that there is not even a little difference between the Guru and God and both of them are one (GGS, IV, 442) and, on the other hand, he also says that the Word is the Guru and the Guru is the Word or *bani* (GGS, IV, 982). Thus, God, Word and Guru become essentially one with each other in the Sikh ontological thought.

There are also instances in the Sikh history and tradition which show that the person Gurus held the Word or *bani* in high esteem. We shall here refer to only two of them from the life of Guru

Arjan Dev. As some of the Sikh chronicles say, Guru Arjan went to Baba Mohan to get from him the collection of hymns of his spiritual predecessor which, it is said, was available with him in two volumes. After getting this from him, the Guru respectfully placed the holy possession in a palanquin and took them to Amritsar where he sat down to compile the scripture. As the manuscripts were being carried in the palanquin, from Goindwal to Amritsar, Guru Arjan Dev is said to have followed it bare foot as a mark of respect. The second incident relates to the days when the scripture was already compiled and was ready for installation in the newly constructed Harimandar. The holy volume was installed there on *manji* (literally cot) *sahib*, but the Guru himself sat on the bare floor. Even during the night when the scripture was put to rest on the *manji sahib*, the Guru used to sleep on the bare floor, i.e. on the lower platform. So highly was the Word respected by the Guru himself. Even later on, it is said that once Guru Gobind Singh was approached by certain Sikhs with the request to get both the Adi Granth/Guru Granth Sahib and the Dasam Granth bound together in one volume. The Guru, as says Chhibbar's *Bansavalinama*, forbade them saying that the former contained the revelatory hymns whereas the latter was his poetic pastime, and thus they cannot be put together.

There have been some schismatic groups within Sikhism which refuse to accept the fact of the scripture being given the status of the Guru. For example, the Kukas or Namdharis have preferred to continue the line of person Gurus after the tenth Guru, and they have their eleventh and twelfth person Gurus even though they pay reverence to the scripture as well. The recent mushroom growth of *deras* with largely the Sikh following is also a dangerous development. In the name of the propagation of the Gurus' message, several of the leaders of these *deras* do not work as much toward uniting man with the Real One as do they endeavour to unite the seekers unto themselves. Many of them pose as person-Gurus without of course stating so in explicit terms and in the process they also prescribe a *rahit* or code for their followers different from other Sikhs. This causes schism among the Sikhs for the reason that this is a deviation from the Sikh belief in ten person Gurus and in the Word (Guru Granth Sahib) there after and also divides the community into followers of varied *deras* rather than those of the One. This trend needs to be rectified and

the community needs to take several steps to this regard.

But in the present context, it would suffice to present certain empirical evidences to the effect that Guru Gobind Singh put to end the institution of person-Guru and instead bestowed the office of Guru for all times to come on the scripture. There have been available several contemporary sources which testify to this fact. One such source is an entry in the *Bhatt Vahi Talauda Parganah Jind*. A free rendering into English of the relevant entry in this *Vahi* would read as follows:

Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Maser, son of Guru Tegh Bahadur, grandson of Guru Hargobind, greatgrandson of Guru Arjan, 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 chauath* of the month of Kartik, 1765 Bikrami [16 October 1708], to fetch the Granth Sahib. The Guru placed before it five pice and a coconut and bowed his head before it. He said to the congregation: 'It is my commandment: "Own Sri Granth Ji in my place. He who so acknowledges it will obtain his reward. The Guru will rescue him. Know this as the truth."'"

Some of the Bhattis, hereditary panegyrists, genealogists or family bards, who came into the Sikh fold in significant numbers at the time of Guru Arjan Dev, recorded events of the lives of the Gurus in their scrolls called *Vahis*. Some of these scrolls are said to have been extant even to this day in some Bhatt families, especially at the village of Karsindhu in Jind district. The script of the entries in these scrolls is called Bhatkshari - a kind of family code like *lande* and *mahajani*. According to Giani Garja Singh, the only known scholar to have worked on these manuscripts, the author of this entry, quoted above, is one Narbud Singh Bhatt who was with Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded at that time.

The second such testimony is a letter issued by reference of Guru Gobind Singh's wife Mata Sundri. This letter, still preserved with a family of Bhai Rupa village in Bathinda district, exhorts all Sikhs to have faith only in ten human preceptors; to believe in any other human preceptor is called a mortal sin. The letter goes on further to say: "Go only to the Ten Gurus in search of the Word.... The Guru resides in *sabda*. The Lord hath merged His own self

in the Guru through whom He has revealed His Word. The Word is the life of all life, for, through it, one experiences God". The letter also makes a clear injunction against Ajit Singh (the adopted son of Mata Sundri) posing as Guru and some among the followers of Banda Singh Bahadur acknowledging their leader as Guru.

Bhai Nand Lal, one of the court poets of Guru Gobind Singh, in his *Rahitnama*, i.e. code of conduct, also testifies to the above fact. Nand Lal, who is believed to have spent long years at Anandpur under the care and patronage of the Guru and who has been known for his elegant Persian poetry, was at that time also at Nanded, though now in the camp of Emperor Bahadur Shah as his minister. An epilogue at the end of his *Rahitnama* sums up as under the last words the Guru is believed to have addressed to the Sikhs then present:

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,
Let him with all his head read the Granth,
Or listen to the Granth being recited.

Bhai Prahlad Singh is another of Guru Gobind Singh's disciples who has also composed a *Rahitnama*, or code of conduct, wherein he records the commandment of the Guru in the following words:

By the word of the Timless One
Has the Khalsa been manifested.
This is my commandment for all my Sikhs:
You will acknowledge Granth as the Guru.

There have been some contemporary non-Sikh sources as well which testify to this fact. One example in support of the above contention is the Sanskrit manuscript *Nanakcandrodayamahakavyam* by Devaraja Sharma: this has been published in book form by the Sanskrit University, Varanasi, a few years back. All these and several such other sources coupled with the strong Sikh tradition reiterate our statement that after the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, the scripture, now called Guru Granth Sahib, has been the Guru for all times to come for the Sikhs.

Guru Granth Sahib is, however, not just a scripture, a holy book, or an anthology of hymns for the Sikhs: it is a lot different

and much more. It is the spiritual mentor, the preceptor, the living Guru for the Sikhs. They hold it in deep respect, but do not worship it. Any injury or harm to it is invariably taken as an injury or harm to a living being. It is the presiding deity in all Sikh shrines but it is not the object of worship at an altar. It is the guiding principle for a Sikh in all spheres of life: he seeks guidance from and prays to it while starting a new venture, for the successful completion of an auspicious ceremony in one's life or family, to tide over a crisis in individual or communal life, and so on.

Since the scripture is not a systematic philosophical treatise, we do not find any specific text or texts dealing with the concept of Guru, though there are numerous references scattered throughout the scripture defining the concept and expressing the importance and role of the Guru. Among the most often used metaphors for him are the *tirath* or the place of holy pilgrimage, the *khevat* or the one who takes man across the world-ocean, *dipak* or the lamp which lights up the entire world, *joti* or the light which illumines the world, *data* or the donor of wisdom, *paras* or the philosopher's stone which turns even the base material into gold, *sura* or the hero whose sword of knowledge rends the veil of darkness, and so on.

In the scripture, the Guru and the Sabda or Word are also juxtaposed. They have also been used synonymously and also as one word, i.e. *sabdaguru*. The word *sabda*, taken from Sanskrit but of obscure etymology, can be rendered as sound, voice, utterance, speech or word. In the distinctive Sikh usage, it stands for any hymn or composition as found included in the Guru Granth Sahib. Here it stands for the word or message or revelation as it came to the Gurus direct from God. As the *sabda* in the Sikh context is believed to be spoken by God, it implies the voice or the utterance is divine. And the utterances as received from the Lord are communicated in mundane language by the Guru for the benefit of the mankind. This means that the word or *sabda* originally belongs to God and that the Guru is only the instrument or the vehicle through which it is articulated and communicated. As we said above, Guru Nanak calls himself a *shair* or poet and his speech as *khasam ki bani* or the utterance of the Lord. Similarly, the following Gurus also reiterate Guru Nanak's view with minor differences in phraseology. Since the Divine voice and the *joti* within the person of the Guru are the same in essence, the scripture

identifies one with the other - *bani guru guru hai bani* (*bani* or the utterances of the Guru are the Guru, and Guru is what he utters), says Guru Ram Das.

The above implies that the historical Gurus of the Sikh faith uttered whatever they received from the Lord God. There are several hymns in the scripture testifying to the fact that they uttered only the Word as received from God - *jaisi mai avai khasam ki bani taisara kari gian ve lalo* (O Lalo, I proclaim the Lord's Word as it comes to me), says Guru Nanak. Thus, in this sense, God Himself becomes the primal Guru of the whole creation, and this Guru chooses certain persons to act as His instruments. This is how Guru Nanak, in his *Sidh Gosti*, refers to God as his Guru. "God has placed Himself within the Guru, which He explicitly explains," says the scripture (466). Since God's chosen ones remain ever in tune with the supreme Being, the scripture accepts God as residing within the Guru. Thus, Guru, God and Word (God's Word made manifest through the Guru) are used interchangeably in the scripture.

The Guru is sent by God but he is not the incarnation of God, as we have said in the preceding pages. The two most important attributes of God declared in the scripture are His being *ajuni* (not subject to birth) and *saibhan* (self-existent or not created or born of any external agency). Thus, God is never born in any form whatever. The scripture very severely condemns those who believe in the idea of Divine incarnation. There are always in human society people who are not but only pretend as Gurus or *pirs* or holy men of some or the other denomination. The scripture calls such people blind guides, traders in ignorance and superstition, and so on. For example, at one place the scripture denounces those self-proclaimed *gurus* and *pirs* who go begging and are parasites on society. The humankind is advised not to fall at the feet of such people because a blind *guru* or *pir* cannot lead his disciple on the path to spiritual progression. On the contrary, the Sikh scripture holds that an enlightened person who knows the true way of life can never be a parasite, rather he makes an honest earning with the sweat of his brow and shares it with the needy. We ought to be today wary of the self-proclaimed *babas* and sants who tend to be hedonic, preferring material comforts at the expense of simple austere life given to moral and spiritual values and who try to cover up their lack of spirituality with an aura of worldly grandeur.

IV

In sum, Sikhism accepts *sabd* as Guru. There are several references in the scripture to the effect that *sabd* or *bani* is the Guru. Guru Arjan has also equated *pothi* (the volume that contained the divine word) with God - *pothi pamesar ka thanu* (Pothi is the dwelling place of God). We have also instances from Sikh history and tradition when the person-Guru placed the Granth or the word as contained in the Granth in a position superior to himself. This, no doubt, implies that the Granth or *pothi* enjoyed from the very day of its compilation a respected position because it contained the divine word. However, during the lifetime of the ten Gurus, the person-Gurus remained the main focus of the devotees' faith. After Guru Gobind Singh put an end to the succession of person-Gurus, the place of the Guru came to be occupied by the Word or the Word as contained in the Granth. To say that this position was bestowed on the scripture later on by the community out of some historical necessity is to misread the history and misguide the masses. However, Guru in Sikhism does not take man to a position of higher spirituality as if by miracle or on a crutch: he simply guides who shows seekers the path and the seeker has to tread the path himself.

Chapter III

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606), the fifth spiritual preceptor of the Sikh faith who played a pivotal role in the growth and development of the Sikh faith, gave to the Sikhs their holy Book, now called the Guru Granth Sahib, their central place of worship, the Harimandar (popularly called Darbar Sahib but known as the Golden Temple among the people of the west), and became the first martyr in the Sikh tradition having laid down his life for the freedom of faith and against religious intolerance and fanaticism. He composed the highest number of hymns among all other contributors to the Holy Volume, compiled the holy volume and installed it in the newly constructed Harimandar at Amritsar. He built the Harimandar, popularly also called the Darbar Sahib, in the midst of the *amritsar* tank after having its foundation laid by the famous Sufi saint, Mian Mir. He courted martyrdom, the first ever such instance in the history of Indian religions, when the intolerant and fanatic religious policy of the contemporary Mughal government became apprehensive of the rising popularity of the Sikh movement which stood for religious plurality and their validity. He was first among the Sikh Gurus to have experienced from the day of his birth an environment saturated with the tenets of Guru Nanak and to spend his entire childhood under the care of the Guru.

Guru Arjan came of a Sodhi family and the Sodhis, as says Guru Gobind Singh in his autobiographical *Bachitra Natak*, are the descendants of Luv, one of the two sons of Rama, the son of King Dashratha. In one Sodhi family of Chuna Mandi in Lahore was born on 24 September 1534 Bhai Jetha to Hari Das and Anup Dei, also called Daya Kaur. However, some chroniclers like Kesar Singh Chhibbar in his *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka* or geneology of the ten Sikh Gurus, are of the view that Bhai Jetha was born on 20 Kartik 1587 Bikrami/AD 1530. Bhai Jetha later became Guru Ram Das, the fourth spiritual preceptor of the Sikh

faith. He was married to Bibi Bhani, daughter of Guru Amar Das who came of a Bhalla Khatri family. However, as in the case of Bhai Jetha's date of birth, there is no consensus among historians on the date of his marriage also.

Bhai Jetha left Lahore at the age of twelve and travelled on to Khadur with some people and thence on to Goindwal in the modern-day district of Amritsar. After he came in contact with Guru Amar Das, he preferred to spend more of his time in service of the Guru at Goindwal, the town founded, in 1546, by Guru Amar Das at the command of his predecessor, Guru Angad (1504-1552). However, after his marriage with Bibi Bhani on 18 February 1554, Goindwal became their permanent residence. Although the common practice in this part of the land favoured the bride shifting over to the native place of the groom yet in this case the couple chose to stay in Goindwal so as to be near the Guru. Guru Amar Das was so impressed by his complete understanding of the articles of Sikh faith that he sent him to Lahore to meet with Emperor Akbar in order to answer objections raised against his running the institution of *langar* in violation of the traditional religious and social customs ignoring the distinctions of the four castes.

It was here that all the three children - Prithi Chand, Mahadev and Arjan Dev - were born to the couple. Guru Arjan Dev was born 19 Vaisakh (*vadi 7*), Bikrami 1620 corresponding to 15 April 1563. This is the date arrived at by the Punjabi University's Encyclopaedia of Sikhism. Scholars like Giani Gian Singh (*Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*), Kahn Singh (*Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh*), Max Arthur Macauliffe (*The Sikh Religion*), Ganda Singh and Teja Singh (*A Short History of the Sikhs*) and Sahib Singh (*Jiwan Britant Sri Guru Arjan Dev Ji*) also agree with this view and give 1620 Bikrami/AD 1563 as the year of the Guru's birth. However, there is not unanimity on this date though there is no difference of opinion as to Guru Arjan being the youngest of the three siblings. The scholars who do not agree with this date include Kesar Singh Chhibbar (*Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka*), Santokh Singh (*Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth*), Gulab Singh (*Gurpranali*) and Santren Prem Singh (*Gur Pur Prakash*). They hold that he was born on 18 Vaisakh 1610 Bikrami/AD 1553. Modern researches have proved the latter view unacceptable, and we also tend to agree with the view and accept 15 April 1563 as the date of the Guru's birth.

Arjan Dev spent the first about eleven years of his life under the loving care of his maternal grandfather, Guru Amar Das, who bestowed immense love and affection on the precocious child. The religious temper of both his grandparents influenced him deeply. He was only a small kid when Guru Amar Das, realizing the potential wisdom of the child, had declared him *bani ka bohitha* or the vessel of Word. After the death of Guru Amar Das in 1574, the family shifted to the new habitation of Chak Ramdas (modern-day Amritsar) where Guru Ram Das had taken up the long-drawn and arduous task of founding a new habitation around the holy tank, called *amritsar*, which he had got dug. The young Arjan Dev spent the next about five years under the care of his father. Here he is said to have taken keen interest in the construction of the newly coming up town and helped his father in various ways.

Guru Arjan Dev, as we said, spent his childhood under the care of his maternal grandfather, Guru Amar Das, and thus benefited from the spiritual atmosphere at home. There is not much information available about the kind of education he received : although he had received much of his spiritual training under the care of his maternal grandparents, yet Baba Budha was deputed to teach Gurmukhi and scriptural literature to [Guru] Arjan Dev. During this while, Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Sawan Mall and others were his mates in the class. He learnt Hindi from Keso and Gopal in the village *Chatsal* and Sanskrit from Pandit Beni. He studied Persian from the local school. He was divinely blessed with a precocious mind and learnt different languages and literature in a short time. A study of his works shows that he had a very sound grounding in Hindi, Sanskrit and Persian apart from Punjabi and some its dialects.

II

The Sikh tradition holds that Guru Arjan married twice. His first marriage was solemnised with Ram Dei, daughter of Chandan Das, a Khatri of village Maur. However, Ram Dei did not live long and is said to have died soon after the marriage. Thus, the Guru married the second time, and the second marriage was with Mata Ganga, daughter of Kishan Chand of village Mau in Jalandhar district. Just as difference of opinion on the date of Guru Arjan Dev's birth has persisted, scholars have differed on the dates of his marriages as well. As it is, there are scholars who conveniently skip the issue of second marriage and of determining the date of

marriage. There are scholars like Bhai Kahn Singh, *Mahan Kosh*, who refer only to one marriage of the Guru whereas some others say the Guru married the second time. According to the scholars (like Kesar Singh Chhibbar, *Bansavalinama*, and Gulab Singh, *Gurpranali*) which hold on to AD 1553 as the Guru's birth, Guru Arjan Dev got married in 1622 Bikrami/AD 1565 to Ram Dei of Maur, also called Marua. Since modern research has rejected this date of birth, it seems difficult to agree to this date of marriage also. Another date of marriage given is 1633 Bikrami/AD 1576 which could possibly have been the date of the Guru's first marriage. The Guru was at this time about thirteen years of age and marriage at such a young age was the norm of the day. The *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism* gives 19 June 1589 as the date of Guru Arjan's marriage with Mata Ganga. As we said earlier, the *Mahan Kosh* and the *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism* refer only to the Guru's marriage with Mata Ganga.

When the Guru's spouse did not conceive for several years after marriage, the entire family felt worried. It is said that the wife of Prithi Chand would often taunt Mata Ganga for being childless. Only Prithi Chand and his wife were happy because they felt that in the case of Guru Arjan remaining childless, the spiritual succession which Prithi Chand felt disappointed to lose to Guru Arjan would come to Manohar Das (1581-1640), popularly known as Miharban, the eldest son of Prithi Chand, whom Guru Arjan also held in much affection. Various chronicles refer to how Prithi Chand's wife used to taunt the Guru's wife for not giving birth to a child and how openly she would say that all the material possessions of the Guru would one day come over to her son.

Some traditional accounts say that one day Mata Ganga approached Guru Arjan with a request that the Guru who showers varied blessings on his devotees should also bless her with a son. Contentment and humility were the most prized virtues with the Guru. He who with the blessings of God imbibes humility in heart attains all joy in this world and the next, says Guru Arjan in one of his hymns included in the Sikh scripture (GGGS, V, 278). Therefore, he advised Mata Ganga to go to Baba Buddha, (1506-1631), a Sikh of the time of Guru Nanak and a pious soul who had had the rare honour of performing the succession rites in the case of all the preceding Gurus, and seek his blessing. It is said that first she went to Baba Buddha with all pomp and show and failed to receive

the Baba's blessing. Then the Guru advised her to go in all humility like a seeker and she obeyed. This time, so says the account, Baba Buddha blessed her saying that a son will be born to her who will be such a great warrior as he will thrash the heads of the cruel and oppressive monarchy. Guru Arjan and Mata Ganga had a son Hargobind, born to them on 19 June 1595 at Wadali.

No doubt, Guru Ram Das and Bibi Bhani were blessed with a grandson when a son, Manohar Das Miharban, was born to their eldest son, Prithi Chand. However, Guru Arjan was still issueless and he showered all his affections on Manohar Das Miharban. This led Prithi Chand and his wife to believe that since the Guru loved Miharban so much and since he himself was issueless, the succession would naturally pass over to Miharban: the thought of his son succeeding Guru Arjan was a great consolation to Prithi Chand who himself had missed it. However, unfathomable are the ways of God. Guru Arjan and Mata Ganga were blessed with a son, named Hargobind. At the birth of his only son, there were rejoicings in the Guru's household but Prithi Chand and his wife were saddened. Burning in the fire of jealousy, they now stooped very low and made several attempts at the life of the child, but life and death, as they say, are in the hands of God, and the child Hargobind survived all such attempts.

III

In the Sikh tradition the spiritual succession did not come as a rightful claim to the elder male issue, and it was never sure that it will remain in family. The succession always went to the most deserving of the disciples, whether in the family or outside of it. Guru Nanak appointed Bhai Lahina (later Guru Angad Dev) his successor ignoring the claims of both of his sons simply because Lahina was the most deserving of them all. Similarly, Guru Angad Dev bypassed his own sons in favour a deserving disciple, Guru Amar Das. As the time came Guru Amar Das selected his most deserving disciple who also happened to be his son-in-law, Bhai Jetha who later came to be known as Guru Ram Das. When it was time for Guru Ram Das to appoint his successor, he had three of his sons and innumerable disciples to choose from. In the secular life, it is the eldest son who generally succeeds his father and it is, as goes a very important Indian tradition, also the eldest son who at the time of his father's death is offered a turban which symbolizes responsibility. However, the spiritual succession

in the Sikh tradition did not follow this secular pattern.

The eldest son of Guru Ram Das was no doubt a very wise and intelligent person in worldly affairs and he rendered very useful service to his father-Guru in managing diverse kinds of jobs. However, he was not doing all this in a selfless way, rather he had been doing this with an eye on succession. In fact, he always contrived to remain close to the Guru so that he could oversee all the activities going on in the Guru's *darbar* and also have access to all the offerings being made to the Guru. However, he meticulously kept up the pretence of one rendering service under the Guru's command. Having done so much for the Guru and the Sikhs, the office of the Guru, he assured himself, was rightfully his. He was ignorant of the Sikh teaching that service rendered with a motive gives birth only to ego, and only he who serves in a selfless manner meets the Lord (GGS, V, 286). At another place, the Sikh scripture says that service should be rendered without any deceit or motive in mind because only the service thus rendered brings all joys and comforts (GGS, IV, 861). Prithi Chand who was very jealous of his youngest brother who through his selfless service had become the object of the Guru's love, had also begun to conspire with certain *masands* and others to manipulate the succession decision in his favour. The Guru, of course, forbade him several times from such activities, but the more he was advised against the more keenly he got involved in such unbecoming acts.

If the eldest of the sons, Prithi Chand, was very intelligent and more given to the affairs of the world, his younger brother, Mahadev, was completely other-worldly by temperament. He had ascetical leanings and had absolutely no interest in the affairs and things of the world. An ideal sikh must keep close to each other the parallel streams of esoteric and exoteric life. The Guru realized that neither of his elder sons was worthy of leading the Sikh movement initiated by Guru Nanak Dev whereas he found in his youngest son, Arjan Dev, the perfect blend of this-worldly and the other-worldly, the potential to keep close to each other the spiritual and secular aspects of life. He was also the only one to pass the test of willing and unquestioned submission to the Guru's will. He was a divinely inspired poet who also had the moral strength to suffer, with a calm mind, the torture and even death for the sake of righteousness.

It is said that once a cousin of Guru Ram Das came from Lahore and called on the family to extend them an invitation for the marriage of his son, Sanhari Mall, at Lahore. However, Guru Ram Das was so preoccupied with his responsibilities that he could not find time to go and visit the family in Lahore, but since it was a social obligation, he wanted the eldest of his sons to represent the family. But the wily mind of Prithi Chand apprehended that it might not be a ruse to get him out of the way to pass over the succession to one of his younger brothers. So he excused himself from going there. Guru Ram Das then asked Mahadev to go and attend the marriage, but he was also not interested though for different reasons. When Arjan Dev was asked, he willingly obeyed and got ready to leave. Before his departure however, the Guru asked him to remain there after the marriage, establish the congregations in and around Lahore and preach the message of the Gurus and also look after the ancestral house and other properties. The command was obvious that he was to stay on in Lahore until called back.

Arjan Dev went to Lahore, attended the wedding ceremonies and stayed there doing the Guru's bidding and waiting for a message to return to Amritsar. Days passed into months and months passed into years. He is said to have continued the work of preaching and organizing congregations in Lahore for about three years. This was for the first time that he had been made to stay away from the Guru for such a long time. He felt very anxious to have a glimpse of the Guru, but was bound by the Guru's directive to stay back in Lahore until called back. He had gone to Lahore in 1636 Bikrami/AD 1579 and remained there till 1638 Bikrami, which came to about three years. As he intensely felt the pangs of separation, he wrote, so says the chronicle, a versified letter to the Guru expressing the pangs of his separation from the Guru and his keenness to have a glimpse of him. As the letter reached home, Prithi Chand received it on the Guru's behalf. He managed to hide it from the Guru who was never informed of the letter and of the feelings of Arjan Dev. After a while, he wrote another letter which also met the same fate. This made him further desperate, unable to comprehend the reasons for keeping him away for so long. Now he decided to send another letter through a devoted Sikh with the directive that he should deliver the letter direct to the Guru. As the letter was numbered three, the Guru

wanted to know the fate of the previous two letters but Prithi Chand denied having received any though, it is said, the Guru was able to have them traced from Prithi Chand's residence. All the three letters, pregnant with spiritual overtones, gave vent to the pangs of his heart. The Guru realized the feelings of Arjan Dev and immediately sent Baba Buddha to bring him back.

As Arjan Dev reached back in Amritsar, he composed the fourth stanza to supplement the earlier three he had sent in the form of letters to the Guru. This fourth stanza, in joyful praise of the Guru, highly impressed Guru Ram Das with its spiritual idiom. This was the time when Guru Ram Das had made up his mind to bestow the light of Guru Nanak upon Arjan Dev whom he found perfectly suitable for this responsibility. As the Guru felt Arjan Dev fit to inherit the mantle of Guru Nanak, he assembled many of his prominent Sikhs and proclaimed his decision appointing Arjan Dev as his successor. As per the tradition, Guru Ram Das placed before him five pice and a coconut and bowed to him. Baba Buddha put the ceremonial mark on his forehead as he had done at the time of previous three successions. The congregation that had gathered on the occasion was also directed to accept now onwards Arjan Dev as the Fifth Nanak. This happened on Bhadon sudi 1, 1638 Bikrami/1 September 1581.

IV

However, Prithi Chand was not happy at this development as he had been under the impression that being the eldest son and having done a good deal of work looking after the visiting devotees and the institution of *langar*, he was the only rightful inheritor. Now he got desperate and is also said to have used foul language first with Baba Buddha and then with his own father. Guru Ram Das did not like the behaviour of his eldest son but with a view to avoiding any further bickering, he left Chak Ramdas (Amritsar) for Goindwal soon thereafter and took lodgings where once Guru Amar Das had stayed and meditated. Baba Mohri, a son of Guru Amar Das, came to the Guru to pay his obeisance. It was here that the Guru breathed his last and his body was cremated on the bank of the Beas.

Prithi Chand continued to conspire against Guru Arjan. First, he did not accept the succession to Guru Arjan and with the help of some unscrupulous *masands* put himself up as the Guru. The Sikh devotees who came to have a glimpse of the Guru and seek

his blessings felt themselves in a dilemma on reaching Amritsar. Baba Buddha and some other well meaning Sikhs tried their best to explain the truth to the devotees, but some hired *masands* continued spreading falsehood for the sake of some material gains. They would mislead the common devotees, accept their offerings on behalf of Prithi Chand and then send them to the *langar* being run by Guru Arjan. Thus, the paucity of funds created several problems and it became rather difficult to run the *langar*. Truth prevailed ultimately though it involved a lot of effort on the part of Baba Buddha, Bhai Gurdas (who had just returned from Agra where he was earlier appointed to preach the Gurus' teachings) and some other Sikhs to undo the false propaganda being done by Prithi Chand and his hired *masands*.

Prithi Chand also made complaints to the government seeking interference on the plea that being the eldest son it was his right to succeed his father. He even once invited Sulhi Khan, a Mughal *faujdar*, to visit Hehar, the village of his in-laws where he had now begun to reside, on the pretext of collecting revenue in the Amritsar area. He wanted to involve the Guru in some case and get him arrested or executed so that he could then succeed him. As the Guru got the news of Sulhi Khan visiting Hehar, he sent his family to Wadali apprehending some mischief or misfortune. It was here at Wadali that the child Hargobind was born. On the other hand, Sulhi Khan who had gone to inspect the brick kiln of Prithi Chand accidentally fell into it and got burnt alive. Thus, there was rejoicing in the Guru's family at the birth of a son and wailing and weeping in that of Prithi Chand at the loss of a friend and benefactor. Thereafter Sulhi Khan who set out to harm the Guru got killed on the way by his own subordinates as a result of some tiff with them.

Around the month of Magh in 1650 Bikrami/AD 1593, Emperor Akbar was on a visit to the Punjab when he is said to have spent a few years in the northwest of his kingdom: it is said that on 23 Magh he set out from Lahore on a hunting expedition and reached Sheikhpura near Sultanpur Lodhi. On his way back to Lahore, he passed by the newly coming up city of Amritsar. Prithi Chand and his coterie took this opportunity to complain against the Guru for having usurped Prithi Chand's right. The Emperor is said to have had a meeting with the Guru, but the evil designs of Prithi Chand did not succeed.

V

After Guru Nanak, the following Gurus including Guru Arjan Dev did not travel far outside the Punjab, but a network of *manjidars* had been established to keep the *sangats* or congregations in far flung areas connected with the Guru. Earlier, they were called *melis* or *manjidars* : some even called them *sangatias*. Guru Arjan further strengthened this system and re-designated these preachers of the faith as *masands*, the word used in the Persian for a noble. Perhaps the Guru did so because he himself had also started to live in style and the followers had begun to address him as Saccha Patshah. It is also said that the Guru had started the tradition of maintaining a group of armed Sikhs. The Guru also initiated the practice of *dasvandh* or tithes : the *masands* would collect these offerings willingly made by the devotees and deposit them with the Guru twice an year - on the Vaisakhi and the Diwali days. Various chronicles record that the Guru's share was paid more willingly and without fail than the revenue of the Mughal government. These funds were used by the Guru to meet expenses on building plans, digging of wells and such other philanthropic ventures undertaken by him.

The first task that Guru Arjan Dev undertook was the completion of the sacred pool of *amritsar*. Devotees came from far and wide to render volunteer service in the digging of the sacred tank. Alongside this, the Guru also started extending the town and building the Harimandar in the midst of the sacred pool. The famous Sufi saint, Hazrat Mian Mir (1550-1635), was requested to lay the cornerstone of the building. He is said to have come to Amritsar at the Guru's invitation and "with his own blessed hand put four bricks, one on each side, and another one in the middle of the tank." The prevailing practice at that time was to have the entrance of the holy place on the eastern side only, and that used to be the only entrance. However, the Guru gave four doors to the building, one on each side. It is believed that the four doors symbolized its accessibility to each from any side: people belonging to all the four castes, i.e. the entire mankind, could enter in and say their prayers. Unlike the Hindu temples and Muslim mosques which are usually built on a raised plinth, the Harimandar was constructed on a lower plinth than the surrounding area. The idea was that one should go to the temple of God with humility in mind. The Harimandar, which gradually became a

cultural and spiritual centre of the Sikhs, was also provided with a *langar* in keeping with the practice of his predecessors. Anybody irrespective of his caste or creed or colour or race or sex could go inside the *sanctum sanctorum* to pray and everybody could go to the *langar* and partake of food with everybody else. Around the temple developed various markets to which the Guru invited traders from different regions to settle and open their business.

One of the very significant undertakings of Guru Arjan Dev's career was the compilation of the scripture. The Gurus had made unequivocal statements in their hymns that the "*bani* is the Guru and the Guru is *bani*". By compiling these revelatory hymns in one volume, the Guru wished to affix the seal on the sacred word and preserve it for posterity. For this purpose, he had to collect the hymns, sift the genuine from the counterfeit and then sit down to assign the hymns to appropriate musical measures. The work involved editing and recasting wherever necessary and then the entire corpus was to be transcribed in a minutely laid-down order. The work involved meticulous thoroughness and extraordinary exactness and a precise method had to be followed to set down the compositions of different authors. It was a task which involved sustained labour and rigorous intellectual discipline. The Guru chose a beautiful and quiet spot in the vicinity of Ramsar and started on this project, with Bhai Gurdas acting as an amanuensis with him. The work on the compilation of this holy volume was completed on Bhado sudi 1, 1661 Bikrami/16 August 1604.

Guru Arjan Dev left Amritsar to meet the congregations and preach his message. Throughout his pontificate he travelled only through the central Punjab. Recorded history speaks of his journeys between Amritsar, Goindwal, Lahore, Tarn Taran and Kartarpur (Jalandhar). He seems to have concentrated on consolidation and development of the community through his leadership, institutional reforms and hymns. He left Amritsar along with Bhai Gurdas, Baba Buddha, Bidhi Chand and others and first went over to Jandiala at the invitation of Handal. From there he travelled through Khara village to Behar-Bela where there was a big water-pond. Tradition holds that Guru Amar Das had discovered on the bank of this pond a plant the leaves of which when rubbed had cured the white patches on the skin of Guru Angad Dev. The Guru, attracted by its natural surroundings, purchased this land from its owners and began work on turning it

into a *pucca* pool and a shrine. The place where the Guru had halted came to be called Dukh Niwaran, literally emancipator of sorrows, and the sacred water pond came to be called Tarn Taran because of the curative powers of its water. Many lepers were especially drawn to the place because the Guru treated them here with such loving care. The town that developed around the pool and the shrine also came to be known as Tarn Taran.

Travelling through various villages and towns and spreading his message, Guru Arjan crossed the Beas and reached Sultanpur and Dalla. Wherever the Guru went, he helped people sink wells and undertake several other works of public welfare. He helped people in various ways to alleviate their hardships caused by the famine that had hit the region. The Guru then founded the town of Kartarpur, between the rivers Beas and Satluj, by first erecting there a *dharamsala* and a few residential quarters close by. He also rebuilt a ruined village Ruhela on the right bank of the Beas and renamed it Sri Hargobindpur. Now the Guru made Kartarpur his headquarters from where he went on preaching tours to different directions. As a result of his teachings of equality, love and compassion, many people from the Majha area embraced the Sikh faith. As the *Dabistan-I-Mazahib* says, at least a few Sikhs were definitely found in most of the towns in the country.

During one such preaching journey when Guru Arjan happened to be in Goindwal, Emperor Akbar visited him there on 24 November 1598 and, as per the testimony of Abul Fazal's *Akbar-nama*, the Emperor remitted, at the instance of the Guru, the annual revenue of the peasants of the districts who had been hit hard by the failure of the monsoon. The Emperor was still in the Punjab when complaints reached him about the then recently compiled scripture containing references derogatory to Islam and other religions. When the emperor was camping at Batala, he sent for the Guru so as to reply to the allegations. The Guru deputed Bhai Buddha and Bhai Gurdas to go to the emperor along with the holy volume. The book, so says a Sikh chronicle, was opened at random and a hymn was read out from the spot pointed out by the emperor. The hymn was a eulogy of the Absolute One, and so were the several other hymns read out subsequently for the satisfaction of the emperor. Akbar was fully satisfied and as a token of his appreciation and regard, he made an offering of fifty-one gold mohars to the scripture and presented the robes of honour to

both Bhai Buddha and Bhai Gurdas besides giving another one for the Guru.

VI

As we have said earlier, Prithi Chand had been conspiring again the Guru for the past so many years. Gradually, when his activities and intentions were fully exposed to the Sikhs, he left Amritsar and took up residence at Hehar, the village of his in-laws which was close to Lahore. Emperor Akbar had left Punjab and was on his way to the south via Delhi and Agra. He had put his grandson, Prince Khurram, who later on came to be called Emperor Shah Jahan, in charge of the Punjab. Prince Khurram was the third son of Prince Salim (later Emperor Jahangir) and was even more fanatic than his father. Soon thereafter Prince Salim was also appointed to the province of Ajmer in the neighbourhood of Punjab. All this provided a good opportunity to Prithi Chand and his coterie to feed the ruling authorities with reports against the Guru and his intentions.

Chandu, who held a senior position with the provincial Khurram government in Lahore, held a grudge against the Guru. As it happened, he had sent some emissaries to search out a suitable match for his only daughter. The emissary happened to visit Chak Ramdas and meet the Guru's family there. He found that Hargobind was a suitable match for Chandu's daughter. He went back to his master to report this to him and seek his permission to go ahead for the betrothal. Incidentally that was the time when Kahna, whose compositions the Guru had rejected as unsuitable for inclusion in the Guru Granth Sahib and who was rather upset at this rejection because he was proud of his official position and poetic potential, died on his way back from Amritsar. Chandu, a colleague and friend of Kahna, viewed the Guru responsible for his death. When the emissary reported the possibility of a matrimonial alliance with the Guru's family, he was rather angry and upset. He agreed to accept the word given by his emissary but expressed his arrogance by speaking some derogatory words against the Guru and his family. As his disparaging remarks came to the knowledge of the Sikhs, they went to the Guru and reported the whole matter to him. As was expected, the Guru did not want any alliance with such an egoist person and naturally he rejected this matrimonial offer. Chandu took this humiliation to heart and became a bitter foe of the Guru.

On the other hand, the Sikh faith gained a large number of adherents during Guru Arjan's travels. There were not many cities in the inhabited country where some Sikhs were not to be found, says a Persian source. And they were very well organized through the institution of *masands*. In spite of the nefarious activities of the Minas, this is how Prithi Chand and his coterie had come to be known by that time, the *masands* were very particular in collecting from the Sikhs and handing over to the Guru the voluntary donations or the tithe made by them. The political authorities in Delhi were also apprehensive of the rising popularity of the Sikh movement which, to some, seemed like a state within the state. This fact gets confirmed even from Jahangir's *Tuzk* wherein the Emperor seems to have made up his mind to put an end to the Sikh movement.

Another event took place in Delhi which hastened the pace of events in the Punjab. Within a few months of the succession of Jahangir in 1605, his eldest son, Khusrau (1587-1622), fell foul with his father and rebelled against him. As the latter was on his way to Lahore with a view to take over Punjab, he is said to have called on the Guru and sought his blessings. The Guru, as says the *Tuzk*, put the ceremonial mark on his forehead. Some Sikh chronicles say that the rebel prince stayed overnight with the Guru and partook of food in the Guru ka Langar. Some chronicles also say that the Guru provided him financial help as well. He resumed the journey the next morning, but was soon overtook by the imperial forces at the bank of the Chenab. The rebellion was thus suppressed with the arrest of Khusrau. However, this made Jahangir take very harsh measures against all those whom he suspected of having helped Khusrau in any way. When Jahangir learnt of Khusrau's meeting with Guru Arjan, earlier imperial impressions about the Sikh movement and the complaints lodged by Chandu and others were also in his mind. Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi who, as says a contemporary Persian chronicle, felt jubilant at "the execution of the accursed *kafir* of Goindwal" had also played a very significant role in inciting the Emperor against the Guru as well as against other non-Muslims.

A very significant contemporary account of what reasons might have prompted the Emperor to penalise the Guru is contained in a letter written from Lahore on 25 September 1606 by Father Jerome Xavier, a Jesuit who had been working in India for more

than a score of years. A small Jesuit church was opened in Lahore in 1597 and under Jahangir, who tarried in Punjab until 1608, the Jesuit possessions were confirmed and a cemetery was soon added to them. Jerome Xavier's letter, written originally in Portugese language and addressed to the Jesuit Provincial Superior of Goa, is a private letter and has since been preserved amongst the Marsden manuscripts of the British Museum. The letter, apart from the life of the small Christian community, touches upon the last few months of the life of Guru Arjan Dev, focussing on the revolt of Prince Khusrau against his father and the catastrophe that led to the martyrdom of the Guru. The part of the letter relating to Guru Arjan has been translated by E.R. Hambye into English as follows:

...When the Prince [Khusaro] was fleeing from Agra, he passed through a place where was living a man whom they call the Guru of the gentiles, as amongst us the Bishop and Pope, of theirs. He was held as a saint and venerated as their universal head, and the Prince went to meet him. He asked him for some good omen. He gave it to him for the good of the newly reigning Prince, and put a tikka on his head, although this one [the Guru] was a gentile and the Prince a Moor; yet the Prince was the son of a gentile woman. Thus, owing to the opinion [the Prince] had of the saintliness of that [Guru] he took that mark as a sign of the good success of his undertaking.

When the king had the Prince in his hands, he sent for the said Guru, held him prisoner, and some gentiles interceded for their saint. Finally he was condemned [to pay] more than 100,000 *cruzados* [a *cruzado* was a gold coin struck in Goa since about 1512, then valued 420 *reis* the most common highest denomination then], and a rich gentile begged the mercy of the king, coming forward to stand credit for the said Guru, I say for that money; the king handed him [the Guru] to him [the rich gentile]. It appears that the rich gentile hoped for some interventions to succeed in remitting also the fine. He was mistaken...he gave every day new torments to his saint. He ordered to give him much torture...he took away his food, he did him thousand and one dishonours. In that way their good Pope died, overwhelmed by the sufferings, torments and dishonours....

The letter quoted above is by a Jesuit who cannot be biased to either of the parties and no such aspersions have ever been cast on its authenticity and catholicity. Generally, historians have trusted its truthfulness and it has been quoted in almost all works on Guru Arjan Dev. A careful reading of the letter quoted above brings out two facts rather vividly. One, it was the Emperor who ordered the arrest of the Guru and imposed a very heavy fine on him. Some Sikh chronicles say the fine imposed was two lakh rupees. Two, 'a rich gentile' takes it upon himself to pay the fine to the Emperor but it appears this payment to the Emperor is not to seek the release of the holy man but to secure his legal custody so as to torture him to death. The letter, quoted above, obviously states that " he gave every day new torments to his saint. He ordered to give him much torture...he took away his food, he did him thousand and one dishonours. In that way their good Pope died, overwhelmed by the sufferings, torments and dishonours..." Sometimes some critics argue that the *Tuzk*, apart from imposing a fine, also states that in the event of non-payment of fine, the Guru's family would be arrested and his properties confiscated. There are scholars who hold the view that the arrest of Guru Hargobind is also part of this decree whereas others look at the entire account with some reservation since the entire decree was not carried out. They obviously overlook the fact that the Emperor duly received the fine from "a rich gentile". There was apparently no justification for any further action on his part after having received the payment of fine.

This 'rich gentile' was, as the contemporary and later Sikh history and tradition suggests, Chandu who nursed a grudge against the Guru and was ever on the look out for an opportunity to harm him. Some Sikh scholars also hold that Chandu used the influence of his office and took upon himself the "mean task" of torturing the Guru to death. The Sikh tradition also stands witness to the fact that after Emperor Jahangir gave up hostility toward Guru Hargobind, son and successor of Guru Arjan Dev, and adopted a more reconciliatory attitude, what the Guru sought from the Emperor was the custody of Chandu Shah whom he considered responsible for the torture and execution of Guru Arjan and his own incarceration. Chandu was handed over to the Sikhs. Dragged through the streets of Lahore by angry Sikhs who were witness to the atrocities perpetrated by him on Guru Arjun, Chandu Shah

ultimately met a very cruel and violent death. Ironically, the final blow came from the very person whom Chandu had employed to pour hot sand on the Guru's blistered body.

Anyway, as this opportunity came his way, Chandu did not want to lose it. He paid the fine to the Emperor in lieu of the legal custody of the Guru. The Guru was taken a prisoner in Lahore and was subjected to extreme physical torment for several days. He was made to sit on a red-hot iron plate and burning hot sand was poured over him. He was also made to take a dip in the boiling water. Mian Mir, on learning of this, came to see him and offered to intercede on his behalf. But the Guru forbade him and enjoined him to find peace in the will of God. The Guru, it is said, then expressed a desire to bathe in the river Ravi where he was asked to take a dip. The cold water of the river was more than the blistered body could bear. The Guru passed away on 30 May 1606 wrapped in meditation and peaceful in mind.

Chapter IV

COMPILATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

The Sikhs are called a people of the Book because they are followers of the message contained in their Holy Volume, called the Guru Granth Sahib. Also, the word '*sikh*' literally stands for a disciple who is a learner in religious discipline: this disciple is deeply attached and devoted to his Guru, an office now bestowed on the Guru Granth Sahib for all times to come. This Holy Volume was first compiled under the personal supervision and care of Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru of the Sikh faith. When the appropriate moment to begin work on this stupendous project of compiling the scripture came, Guru Arjan selected a beautiful spot in a dense forest by the side of a water pond, Ramsar, about a mile towards east from the Harimandar in the newly founded town of Amritsar. This was the place where the Guru had earlier spent some time composing his *Sukhmani*. A memorial, called Gurdwara Ramsar, stands at the place where the Guru used to sit during the writing of *Sukhmani* and compilation of the scripture. He took Bhai Gurdas, the well known Sikh exegete and a poet in his own right, with him to act as his amanuensis.

Why Guru Arjan Dev undertook the task of compilation of the scripture has been variously explained in different Sikh chronicles. One most commonly given argument is that the compilation and codification of the Gurus' compositions into an authorized volume was taken up so as to preserve the originality and authenticity of the genuine compositions of the Gurus by precluding all possibilities of interpolation by leaders of certain schismatic groups who had also begun to compose hymns under the pseudonym of Nanak. However, this threat of interpolation cannot be accepted as the sole reason for Guru Arjan Dev taking up the work of compilation, though it sure was one of the important reasons. The importance of *bani* and the need for its preservation were equally important factors: it remains a fact of history that the preceding Gurus realized the importance of preserving their compositions and that they had also expressed this view in some

of their hymns. Thus, we are of the view that Guru Nanak and his successors were all preserving their hymns: they handed over the codex/codices containing their *bani* to their respective successors as the time came.

Among the Sikh sources which consider the apprehension of interpolation as the sole reason include the *Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi* (1718), Sarup Das Bhalla's *Mahima Prakash* (1776), Bhai Santokh Singh's *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* (1843) and Giani Gian Singh's *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa* (1892). The *Gurbilas* and the *Suraj Granth* are almost unanimous in their view that Guru Arjan took up the work of compilation when the apprehensions of interpolation of *kacchi bani* (unauthentic, not genuine hymns) were shared by certain Sikhs, and that the Guru borrowed the two codices containing *bani* of the preceding Gurus from Baba Mohan, elder son of Guru Amar Das, who then lived in Goindval.

Of these two sources, the latter says that Guru Arjan Dev took up compilation only after two Sikhs spoke to the Guru about their apprehensions of interpolation whereas the former is of the view that the apprehension of interpolation expressed by a Sikh only strengthened the Guru's resolve to compile the scripture. Both these sources agree that the Guru first sent Bhai Gurdas and then Baba Buddha to borrow the codices from Baba Mohan. Both of them called on Baba Mohan who each time refused to part with the said codices. Then the Guru himself went to Goindval, "sat in the street below Baba Mohan's attic serenading him on his *tamboora*, a stringed instrument. Mohan was disarmed to hear the hymn and came downstairs with the manuscripts". The hymn said to have been sung by the Guru here to please and appease Baba Mohan is found included in the Guru Granth Sahib, under measure Gauri: the hymn is obviously in eulogy of Lord-God but is said to have been sung by the Guru here to please and appease Baba Mohan. The Guru Granth Sahib, which is revelatory in character, cannot contain anything in praise of anyone other than God: it would be blasphemous.

Giani Gian Singh, in his *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*, differs from both the above-mentioned chronicles as to how Guru Arjan Dev got hold of the *bani* of the preceding Gurus. He says that the Guru sent out messengers with *hukamnamas* addressed to individual Sikhs as well as to congregations in areas far and near

requesting them to send or bring to him any hymns of the preceding Gurus they might have in their possession. Thus, the Guru took several years collecting *bani* from different sources and then sifting the genuine from the fake. Talking of Baba Mohan, he says that the codices of hymns with him had very little *bani*. Gian Singh also makes a reference to one Bhai Bakhatu, of Jalalpur of parganah Hasan-Abdal, who is believed to have resided with the preceding Gurus and had prepared a hand-written volume of their hymns. Bakhatu, as says the *Tawarikh*, had also obtained on the manuscript *nisan* from each of the four Gurus, suggesting the authenticity of the text. The said Bhai Bakhatu responded to the Guru's message and brought the volume to his presence. The Guru, says the *Tawarikh*, marveled at the huge size of the holy manuscript which was so huge and heavy that one could carry or handle with great difficulty. This contained such a large number of hymns that it served as the source material for the scripture.

If we analyze the above two different views, we come out with several discrepancies. The first view depends on the codices with Baba Mohan, but the second view negates its significance by saying that it had but very little *bani*. Also, both these views presume that Guru Nanak and Guru Angad Dev had given over the codices of their hymns to their respective successors as the time came. Then it does not stand to reason that Guru Amar Das did not give these over to his successor, Guru Ram Das, but instead gave them to his son, Baba Mohan. Reference to Bhai Bakhatu in the second view is obviously exaggerated. One, a codex with only the hymns of the first four Gurus cannot be so voluminous and heavy. Second, it also seems unlikely that he got signatures of all the four Gurus to the effect that the hymns recorded were authentic and genuine: Bakhatu could not possibly have lived such a long life.

Both the above views presume that the preceding Gurus did not think of preserving their hymns and even now the idea came to Guru Arjan from the Sikhs. The question now arises: if a person knows well the importance of his sayings, why will he not put them into writing or take some other measures so as to preserve them. Guru Nanak in one of his hymns, says that 'the message of a holy man for an individual is always actually meant for the whole mankind - *parthai sakhi maha purakh bolade sajhi sagal jahanai*. And a message could not be useful for the whole mankind, if

arrangements for its preservation and propagation have not been duly made. Second, preachers give discourses, poets recite poems and scholars give lectures. People come and listen to them, but almost none cares to put the spoken word to pen: only the author has to bear this responsibility if he wants to preserve his writings for posterity.

All these sources referred to above are of the view that the *bani* of the Gurus had been preserved by different devotees of their own, there being implicitly no effort on the part of the Gurus. The argument has very weak legs and does not stand to scrutiny. Guru Nanak during his lifetime travelled a lot and he visited many far-off places. He uttered several hymns during such preaching odysseys, addressing them to some particular persons in some specific historical situations. In several of these situations, the person being addressed to by the Guru was not sympathetic to him or his view-point. In that situation, no one except the Guru himself could write down and preserve the hymn. For example, Guru Nanak uttered a hymn relating to the atrocities perpetrated on the masses during the invasion of Babar. At that time the situation was so chaotic and people so dreadful that expecting people at that moment to write down and preserve the hymns uttered by Guru Nanak would have been asking for too much. In such situations, none except the Guru could have thought of writing down the hymns.

Among the modern writers, Dr G.B. Singh researched in this direction and put his findings in the form of a book, *Prachin Biran*. Dr. Singh believes that Guru Nanak who calls himself a *shair* or poet might have preserved his *bani* in the form of a *pothi*. Bhai Gurdas, in one of his *vars*, also refers to Guru Nanak carrying under his arm a *pothi*, possibly a collections of such *banis*. Dr. Singh also cites several reasons to support his view. However, he errs thereafter when he says that Guru Nanak did not give over this codex to Bhai Lahina when he appointed him his successor, rather this *pothi* reached the hands of Baba Sri Chand after Guru Nanak's passing away. Dr Singh further says that Sri Chand also failed to realize the importance of this sacred *pothi*. Consequently, the codex was offered to the river Ravi along with the body of Sri Chand.

Baba Sri Chand, as the Sikh tradition stands witness, visited Guru Ram Das and later Guru Arjan Dev, and held them in high

esteem. Sri Chand (1494-1629) who passed away during the lifetime of Guru Hargobind (1595-1644), the sixth Nanak, had visited Guru Arjan as he was composing his *Sukhmani* and might also have been aware of Guru Arjan taking up the compiling of the scripture. Moreover, if the Guru had sent messages to other Sikhs, why did he not send the message to Sri Chand as well: the Guru could not possibly be ignorant of Sri Chand having the hymns in his possession? Baba Sri Chand had patched up with the Sikh mainstream during the later phase of his life, especially when he called on the fourth and fifth Gurus and when he requested Guru Hargobind to give him one of his sons for appointment as his successor to lead the Udasi tradition. By then the Udasis had become a preaching class for the Sikhs and they did commendable work looking after the Sikh shrines during the days of their severe persecution. Since Sri Chand had by that time developed high regard for the Gurus, his attitude would not have been of indifference toward the *pothi* and he would certainly not have permitted his followers to put it into the Ravi along with his body.

It does not sound convincing at all, as some scholars say, that Guru Arjan thought of compiling/canonizing the scripture only after the suggestion of a Sikh or that the preceding Gurus did not realize the importance of preserving *bani* and the idea of preserving it came to Guru Arjan only. Interpolation of *bani* by some pseudo-Gurus posed a serious problem and the preservation of its original character was an important issue, but this cannot be accepted as the sole reason for taking up the work of compilation/canonization. Therefore, we tend to agree with the other view which holds that the work of preserving/compilation of *bani* had already started with the preceding Gurus, beginning with Guru Nanak himself. They were well aware of the importance of *bani* and thus had already started the process of preserving and compiling their hymns.

The *Puratan Janam Sakhi*, universally accepted to be the oldest account of the life of Guru Nanak and a near-contemporary source to the compilation, has in it a lot to throw light on the issue of compilation of the scripture. Although the manuscript is not dated yet various scholars have considered it to be a work composed sometime towards the end of 16th or the early 17th century. The historians have testified to the veracity of most of the details of the life of the Guru, and if we extend this argument further, there

is thus every possibility of its contents as regards the compilation of the scripture also being closer to truth.

The *Puratan Janam Sakhi* accepts the fact that Guru Nanak had during his lifetime put his hymns into written form. There are also instances when someone of the devotees, accompanying the Guru at the given time, acted as the scribe. For example, it says that the *Majh ki Var* and the *Sidh Gosti* were recorded by Bhai Saiddo Gheeho who accompanied the Guru at that time. Similarly, it mentions that *Malar ki Var* was put to pen by Hassu and Shihan who were the Guru's companions during his tour of Kashmir. Guru Nanak's stay at Kartarpur during the last years of his life was the most productive and eventful for the development of the Sikh scribal tradition. During these days many codices of Guru Nanak's *bani* were prepared by devotees for their use. It is also here that Guru Nanak asked Bhai Lahina, who later succeeded him, to recite as well as to write down the *Japu* and also to recite it daily in the morning. Bhai Gurdas (Varan, 1.32) also seems to agree with this view as he refers to Guru Nanak holding a notebook (possibly containing his own hymns as well as those of other holy men he might have noted down from different places) under his arm as he travelled about - *asa hathi kitab kachhi kuja bang musalla dhari*. A modern-day scholar and exegete, Professor Sahib Singh, has also argued that Guru Nanak preserved his compositions in writing and bestowed on his successor as the time came; the following Gurus preserved this codex, added to it their own hymns and each one of them handed it over to his successor. There is also a view that the compositions of Guru Nanak were earlier recorded perhaps in different anthologies, but during his last years at Kartarpur, Bhai Lahina was entrusted the job of arranging all these compositions into a *pothi*. Thus, this first redaction of Guru Nanak's *bani*, which had been turned into a codex, was then bestowed on Guru Angad at the time of his appointment as successor to Guru Nanak.

We tend to agree with the above sources that there existed a written codex of Guru Nanak's hymns by the time he passed away and this codex he bestowed on his successor, Guru Angad. It is obviously unrealistic to believe that Guru Nanak bestowed Guruship on Bhai Lahina but did not give over to him the notebook containing his hymns, with the implication that the said notebook perhaps went over to Baba Sri Chand. Guru Nanak, the founder

of the faith, decided to continue the succession of Guruship because he knew that a continued, sustained endeavour was called for to accomplish the objective of spiritual and moral regeneration of mankind. It could not be that he might not have taken care to preserve what, as the scripture itself says, was the revealed word and what he wrote for posterity. After Guru Nanak, each of the following Gurus might also have handed over the codex/codices, comprising his own *bani* as well as of his predecessors, to his successor while bestowing spiritual succession on him.

Also, doctrinally, the Gurus were equally aware of the distinction between themselves (person of the Guru) as God's bards and the message entrusted to them(*bani*), the deliverer of the message and the message itself, human Guru and the Word. Each of the immediate successors of Guru Nanak would certainly have followed the example of preserving his predecessors' codex of *bani*, adding to it his own and making it over to his successor as the time came. This implies that efforts were continuously and consistently made for the preservation of *bani* during the pontificate of first four Gurus before Guru Arjan gave it the final shape. This in no way belittles the unique contribution of Guru Arjan but the fact of history needs be stated as it is.

There has been available enough internal evidence as well to suggest that *bani* of the preceding Gurus was available with each of the successor-Gurus. Guru Nanak composed his hymns in certain specific poetic meters and *ragas* or musical measures. The later Gurus have also composed their verses generally in the same meters and measures earlier used by Guru Nanak. There has been close proximity, both of thought and even of words, between some verses say of Guru Nanak and Guru Angad or Guru Amar Das or Guru Ram Das. This could have been possible only if the later Guru had the text of the *bani* of the preceding Gurus with him. The aim throughout had been two-fold: to preserve the *bani* as guiding principle for mankind for all times to come and also to retain the originality of the Gurus' hymns against attempts at interpolation by the pseudo-Gurus who had begun to compose their own verses under the name Nanak. The Gurus are also believed to have codices prepared of their genuine sacred writings for subsequent circulation among *sangats* and individual devotees.

Now a brief comment on how the *bhagat-bani* was collected, selected and included in the scripture. Although among the

contributors other than the Gurus, there are Sufis, Bhattas and others also along with the Bhagats, but for the sake of popular understanding all of their compositions are clubbed together as *bhagat-bani*. There is a view that the entire *bhagat-bani* has been interpolated in the post-Guru Arjan era through the intrigues of Prithi Chand and Emperor Jahangir. Thus, the entire *bhagat-bani* should, according to this view, be treated as *kacchi bani*. This view has been convincingly and thoroughly rejected by almost everybody except the followers of the Panch Khalsa Diwan of Bhasaur who were especially against the *swaiyyas* of the Bhattas and the *Ragmala*. Babu Teja Singh, a prominent leader of this Diwan was excommunicated by the Akal Takht on 9 August 1928 for holding on to and propagating this view.

According to the *Suraj Granth* and the *Gurbilas*, these Bhagats came to Guru Arjan in their subtle bodies. They were led by Kabir and they had come to request the Guru that their verses should also be included in the Holy Volume he was going to prepare. The author of the *Tawarikh* does not seem to be clear on the issue: he refers to the two views but does not say which he believes to be true. One, the souls of these Bhagats came, presented themselves to Bhai Gurdas and dictated their hymns. Two, Guru Arjan selected the *bhagat-bani* from the *pothis* he borrowed from Baba Mohan. To us, all these views seem to be far from truth as they have been rejected by most of the scholars. Of course, some contemporary poets might possibly have approached Guru Arjan to have their compositions included. The case of Kahna having visited the Guru and the latter rejecting his claim can be cited in this regard.

The close proximity of thought between the *slokas* of Farid and of Guru Nanak shows that Guru Nanak had access to the *slokas* of Farid: in other words, the *bani* of Farid was available with Guru Nanak. The same proximity can be seen between certain hymns of Farid and those of other Gurus, of certain other Bhagats and of the Gurus. This implies that Guru Nanak while on his preaching *udasis* might have collected and preserved *bani* of these holy men from wherever he could get it. This collection might have reached the succeeding Gurus along with Guru Nanak's own compositions. The following Gurus, especially Guru Arjan also might have made efforts to somehow collect such hymns and then by sifting the genuine from the fake included them in the holy volume.

Thus, the first thing that can be said with certainty about the history of the Sikhs scripural text is that it is not of obscure nature: its origins are traced to Guru Nanak Dev. No doubt, these hymns were remembered and sung by many followers but this oral tradition, also known as the *kirtan sampardai*, was neither the first method nor the only way of preserving *bani*: rather, oral tradition in Sikhism, though a popular mode, follows the scribal or written tradition. Guru Nanak and then his spiritual successors tended to record it on its very manifestation. We have given in the preceding pages several arguments to prove this contention. Thus, the scribal tradition was the premier tradition which flourished under the watchful eyes of the first four Gurus before it reached Guru Arjan. In fact, scribing of volumes of *bani* had developed into a pastime with the more devout among the Sikhs. In other words, we can say that the mother tradition of *gurbani* in scribal form had been an ongoing process which was co-extensive with the pontificate of the preceding Gurus. It came down to Guru Arjan at the time of his succession in a well nurtured form. No doubt, the oral tradition also continued along side the scribal tradition: the former is also known as the musical or *kirtan* tradition because it involved remembering hymns for singing. However, it had no independent origins or growth, rather it thrived purely on the scribal tradition.

We thus begin with the assumption that Guru Arjan had with him at the time of his succession codex/codices comprising most of if not all the hymns of the preceding Gurus as well as of some other holy men. Of course, he might have made efforts through messengers and otherwise to ensure that no genuine hymns are left out. But we cannot say with any sense of certainty as to exactly on which day Guru Arjan started work on the compilation of the scripture, but it is sure that Bhai Gurdas completed the job of writing down the main text of the scripture on Bhadon *vadi ekam* Bikrami 1661 (1 August 1604). This is what we find written in the hand of Bhai Gurdas at the head of the contents of the *bir* or recension said to have been hand-written by Bhai Gurdas and now extant with a Sodhi family of Kartarpur. It seems Bhai Gurdas gave the date before beginning to write down the list of contents - a job which might have taken about a week or ten days to complete. The holy volume was then called Pothi (literally volume) or Pothi Sahib (*sahib* is an honorific used here as a suffix). After

getting this hand-written volume duly bound, it was installed in the newly completed building of the Harimandar (now popularly known as the Golden Temple): the Sikh tradition believes that it was Bhadon *sudi ekam* of 1661 Bikrami when the scripture was installed for the first time.

As the holy volume or Pothi Sahib was installed in the Harimandar, Guru Arjan appointed Baba Buddha, a much venerated holy man in Sikh tradition, the first *granthi* or officiant. At that time it contained compositions of the first five Sikh Gurus, from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Arjan Dev, apart from those of some other holy men. It has since then remained unaltered except the inclusion of the hymns of the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur. This was done by Guru Gobind Singh in 1705 at Talwandi Sabo, also called Damdama Sahib, in the present-day Bathinda district. This Volume which Guru Gobind Singh got written in the hand of Bhai Mani Singh and which included the compositions of Guru Tegh Bahadur is no more extant today. It is believed that it got lost/ destroyed during the Vadda Ghallughara or the Great Holocaust which took place on 5 February 1762 at Kup-Rahira, near Malerkotla in Sangrur district of the Punjab. In this carnage, the Sikh loss of life is estimated at about 25 to 30 thousand.

Let us here briefly refer to the story of Bhai Banno taking the holy volume to Lahore via his village Khara Mangat and using this time to get a copy of it made without the knowledge of Guru Arjan. This story has been refuted by various scholars in such detail as we need not repeat here the reasons for its rejection. One thing that appeals even to the simplest of minds is that Guru Arjan could not be so indifferent to the fate of such an important volume prepared after such long labour that Bhai Banno could take as many days and months as he wished on the pretext of getting it bound. We know that Guru Arjan gave much respect to the Volume which means he might have got the work of binding done either at Amritsar itself by hiring the services of a binder or through a more reliable person like Bhai Gurdas or Baba Buddha. Moreover, we know the Volume was installed in the Harimandar soon after its compilation, the question of it being taken away by someone for such a long time does not arise. As an internal evidence indicates, the work of writing down the Banno recension was completed on *Assu Vadi* 1, Bikrami 1661, i.e. about one month after the writing of the main text of the Kartarpur recension.

Obviously, Bhai Banno or his nominees might have made the copy from the original version installed in the Harimandar.

The volume as compiled by Guru Arjan Dev was originally called the Pothi or the Pothi Sahib: the word *pothi* in Punjabi means a book or a volume, and *sahib* is an honorific used here as a suffix just to show one's reverence for it. Bhai Gurdas, the scribe, while recording the fact of completing the job of compilation, called it the Pothi. It was a little later that it came to be called the Adi Granth: the word *adi* means the premier as well as the eternal, and the *granth* implies the volume or the book. It was so called perhaps to distinguish and differentiate it from the volume of compositions by Guru Gobind Singh. The latter came to be called the Dasam Granth or the volume containing compositions of the tenth (*dasam*) Guru vis-à-vis the volume prepared earlier which was premier historically as well as in importance because it was revelatory whereas the Dasam Granth has by the author himself been called, as recorded by Kesar Singh Chhibbar in his *Bansavalinama*, his 'poetic pastime'. It went through another change in nomenclature when it was called and acknowledged as the Guru Granth Sahib: it was in 1708 just before his passing away that Guru Gobind Singh bestowed on it the office of the Guru. Ever since the Sikhs have considered and addressed it as such.

No doubt, the Adi Granth came to be called and regarded as the Guru Granth Sahib only after Guru Gobind Singh had formally bestowed on it the office of Guru in 1708, but indications were available earlier as to this future development. There are several references within the text itself which equate the *bani* or Word with God as well as the Guru. For example, Guru Amar Das says: *vahu vahu bani nirankar hai tis jevad avar na koi* - hail, hail, the word of the Guru, which is the Lord Formless Himself; there is none other, nothing else to be reckoned equal to it (GGS,III,515). Again, Guru Ram Das, the fourth among the ten Sikh spiritual preceptors, reiterates the same as he says: *bani guru guru hai bani* - the *bani* or the Word is the Guru and the Guru is the *bani* or the Word (GGS,IV, 982). Guru Arjan, in one of his hymns, calls the *pothi* or volume containing the divine Word as the dwelling-place of God (GGS, V, 1226). In the Sikh tradition also there are instances when the person-Guru showed great reverence to the Granth Sahib or more precisely to the Word as contained therein. It is said that when the scripture was ready and it was

installed in the Harimandar, Guru Arjan Dev placed it on the *manji sahib* (i.e. on a higher platform) and himself slept on the bare floor (i.e. on the lower platform). Even earlier, it is said that as the manuscript was brought to the Harimandar, the Guru himself walked barefoot as the Holy Volume was put in a palanquin.

The Holy Volume is unique among other sacred literature of the world for certain reasons. One, it has been the only scripture among the world scriptures which was compiled under the personal care and supervision of the preceptor or prophet himself. Most of the other scriptures have been composed or compiled by some disciples or others much after the prophet had passed away. Thus, there can never be any question about the authenticity and genuineness of the contents of the Sikh scripture. Second, it happens to contain within it the spiritual heritage of about five hundred years. Chronologically, Sheikh Farid, one of the contributors to the scripture, has been the first having been born in 1173, and Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs who courted martyrdom in 1675, has been the last. Third, its editorial scheme used by Guru Arjan has been such as to preclude any possibility of later interpolations. It has withstood the test of time, and so far its contents have remained safe from any such attempt. Fourth, it is unique among the scriptural literature of the world over in that it contains hymns of holy men coming from its own traditions as well as from others. Interestingly, all these hymns may they be of Guru Nanak or of Kabir or of Ravidas or of Farid are held equal in importance and reverence. Also, this is perhaps the most voluminous poetic anthology of medieval times. Last though not least, this scripture has the rare distinction of having been bestowed on it the title of Guru. The followers acknowledge the scripture as their living Guru, and any injury or harm to it has invariably been taken a harm or injury to a living being.

After canonization and codification by Guru Arjan, any change in the scripture was neither permissible nor possible. The opinion held by some that the work of compilation and editing of hymns went on even after the canonization of the scripture by Guru Arjan is obviously an attempt at misleading. An effort is made to justify this contention by referring to the plethora of different recensions which were prepared in the post-Adi Granth years. A careful analysis of these recensions would reveal that transmission of *bani* in the pre-and post-Adi Granth period had continued through

various different ways and means. There were several schismatic traditions such as the Bhalla and Mina traditions which ran parallel to the main Sikh scribal tradition all through these years. They prepared various manuscripts which were not strictly canonical but aimed at serving their respective sectarian interests. These traditions were in the ascendancy especially when the Sikh Gurus shifted from the central Punjab to the Sivalik hills. Such manuscripts should have become redundant and lost all religious significance for the Sikhs after the codification of the scripture, but unfortunately such manuscripts continue to surface and cause confusion. The only change after canonization by Guru Arjan that has been accepted in the Sikh tradition is the addition of Guru Tegh Bahadur's hymns by Guru Gobind Singh around 1705.

However, unfortunately, none of the manuscripts belonging to mainstream Sikh scribal tradition of the pre-Adi Granth period is extant today, but the disappearance of such valuable sources can be well understood if and when we study the history of Sikhs during the first half of the eighteenth century when prices were fixed on their heads, uttering of the name of the Guru was prohibited and reading of *bani* of Guru Nanak was a taboo; anyone found disobeying this decree was liable to be arrested and his belly ripped open.

III

The entire corpus of *bani* available in the present printed form of the Guru Granth Sahib is sacred to the Sikhs. It comprises 1430 standard pages and Guru Arjan while compiling it divided the entire corpus into three different sections. The first section, comprising the first thirteen printed pages of the scripture contains *banis* not assigned to any particular musical measure and which also form part of the daily regimen of a Sikh. The second section, the major part of the scripture (pp. 14-1352), comprises thirty-one sub-sections, each given to a *raga*. Each sub-section begins with the hymns of Guru Nanak followed by those of the successive Gurus and the bhagats and others. The third section (1353-1430), is also not assigned to any *ragas* and it concludes with Guru Arjan's *Mundavani* which literally means seal beyond which nothing can be added. At the end, however, is appended the *Ragmala* the authorship of which is unknown.

In its present form, the Guru Granth Sahib contains hymns of six of the ten Gurus of the Sikh faith and those of some holy

men from other traditions including Hinduism and Islam. Among those coming from the Hindu tradition mostly belong to the Bhakti movement and they include Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas, Trilochan, Jaideva, Dhanna, Ramanand, Parmanand, Pipa, Sadhna, Sain, and Beni. In this category are also included the Bhattas who composed *swaiyyas* eulogizing the Gurus, and Rai Balwand and Satta, two bards, who used to sing hymns in the court of Guru Arjan and who also composed a *var* in Ramkali measure which apart from other things stresses the spiritual oneness of all the Gurus. Those from the Muslim background are the famous Sufi saint Shaikh Farid, and Bhikhan. There is another category in which we can include persons coming from the Gurus' families and others who were otherwise closely connected with the Gurus, and this includes Baba Sundar, the great-grandson of Guru Amar Das, who contributed one *Sadu* included in the Guru Granth Sahib under Ramkali measure and Bhai Mardana who accompanied Guru Nanak on his preaching odysseys. All these contributors other than the Gurus are popularly called Bhagats, and the *bani* of all these contributors is generally clubbed under one nomenclature *bhagat-bani*. Theologically, all the scriptural hymns, may they be of Guru Nanak or Farid or Kabir or Ravidas are held in equal respect by the Sikhs: none is superior or inferior to the other. These hymns of the Gurus as well as of the Bhagats as a whole constitute the *bani* which has been given the status of the Guru, the Guru Eternal for the Sikhs.

Most of the scriptures of the world begin with an invocation to God or some deity seeking divine blessings for the successful completion of the venture. In secular literature also the same practice had been prevalent and we find most of the poets in ancient and medieval times beginning their works either with such an invocation or a eulogy of the human patron. In this case, however, such a device is used both to seek Divine blessings as well as to secure financial assistance/rewards from the human patron. Even in our daily routine, a religious person would begin each of his ventures even to the small job of writing a letter with an invocation. If the work - may it be of spiritual or secular content - happened to be divided into several sections and sub-sections, the practice was to repeat the invocation, either in full or in part as the author wished, at the head of each section and even sub-section.

Guru Arjan has also recorded at the opening of the Sikh scripture what is popularly called the *Mul Mantra*: it is not given any title - either *Mul Mantra* or Invocation or any other. The text of the *Mul Mantra* comprises a few words/terms suggesting the attributes of God as articulated by the Sikh Gurus. Transliterated into Roman script, the text of the *Mul Mantra* would run as follows:

*ikoankar satinamu kartapurakhu nirbhau nirvair
akalmurati ajuni saibhan gurparasadi*

A free rendering into English of the above text would mean that the Creator-Lord is one; Call Him Eternal Truth; He is the supreme Creator-Being who is immanent in the creation; He knows no fear and is at enmity with none; His Being is formless and beyond time; He is not born in any form; He is self-existent; and it is only through the grace of the Divine that one can realize Him.

It seems Guru Arjan has used the *Mul Mantra* here as an instructional invocation: in this kind of invocation, the author sings praises of what he is going to deal with in the following text. This invocation thus also introduces the person or thing the author/authors is/are going to deal with in the coming pages. The 'invocation' here eulogizes God as articulated by Guru Nanak, and this Real One in all its aspects and with all its immenseness was to be the subject-matter of the following text of the scripture. We also find that Guru Arjan has repeated this *Mul Mantra* at the head of different sections and sub-sections of the scripture, but it is found written in five different forms - sometimes in full and sometimes in various abbreviated forms.

No doubt, the scripture as such stands as a one single whole, but an analysis of its structure reveals that there are in between the prologue (*Mul Mantra* - invocation) and the epilogue (*Mundavani* - the prayer of thankfulness) at the end, thirty-three sections and various sub-sections. The first of these thirty-three sections following the *Mul Mantra* comprises the first thirteen printed pages and contains liturgical *banis* not assigned to any particular *raga* or musical measure. The hymns included in the first section include *Japu(ji)*, *So Daru* (which forms part of the *Japuji* and of the *Rahiras*, and then appears independently in *Asa raga*), *Sa Purakh* which also is part of the evening prayer *Rahiras* and *Sohila* (popularly called the *Kirtan Sohila* and the *bani* to be recited daily at bedtime). All these compositions also form part of the daily regimen of a Sikh.

Guru Arjan Dev has assigned the following thirty-one sections to a *raga* each. When the Guru first compiled the scripture, it had only thirty *ragas*, and *raga* Jaijawanti in which only Guru Tegh Bahadur composed his hymns came to be added when Guru Gobind Singh made the latter part of the scripture. These thirty-one *ragas* are as follows: Siri, Majh, Gauri, Asa, Gujari, Devgandhari, Bihagara, Vadhas, Sorath, Dhanasari, Jaitsari, Todi, Bairari, Tilang, Suhi, Bilawal, Gaund, Ramkali, Nat Narain, Mali Gaura, Maru, Tukhari, Kedara, Bhairau, Basant, Sarang, Malar, Kanara, Kalian, Parbhati and Jaijawanti. Each of these *ragas* is to be sung at a particular given time during specific season. Of these thirty-one *ragas*, Guru Arjan has composed *bani* in twenty *ragas*. All the *raga*-sections have almost the similar structure: each such section opens on a fresh folio/page and begins with the *MulMantra*. After this each typical *raga*-section is broadly divided into two parts - the first carries the hymns of the Guru and the second comprises *bhagat-bani*, i.e. hymns of contributors other than the Gurus. Each part has several sub-sections, and each sub-section begins with the *Mul Mantra* in its full or abbreviated form and comprises hymns of a particular author under one poetic *genre*. The order of the genres included in the scripture begins with the *padas* (including *ikpada*, *dupada*, *tipada*, *chaupada*, *panjpada*, *chhipada* and *astpadi*) and is followed by *chhant*, miscellaneous smaller compositions, larger compositions and *Vars* at the end. Since all the Gurus composed hymns under the pseudonym of Nanak, Guru Arjan has put Mahla, I, II, III and so on at the head of these hymns to indicate the specific authorship of a given hymn: here Mahla I stands for the first Guru, Guru Nanak, and Mahla II for the second Guru, Guru Angad, and so on.

After the *banis* of the Gurus (*padas*, *chhants* and the titled compositions including both the smaller and the longer ones) in each *raga*-section is included what we popularly call *bhagat-bani*, the compositions of various saints and *bhagats* (other than the Sikh Gurus). This section begins with the verses of Kabir and is followed by those of Namdev, Ravidas Jaideva and so on. Interestingly, order is strictly followed in the case of the *bani* of the Gurus, but in the case of *Bhagats* the order is not strictly chronological. The reason may be the uncertainty about their years: scholars have not been unanimous as to the dates of these contributor-Bhagats even till date. The hymns of the *Bhagats* are

not found in all the *ragas*, and scholars hold different opinions as regards the question whether they did or did not indicate the *raga* at the head of their compositions or they just composed verses in different poetic metres, and not in any *ragas*. It seems some of them might have indicated *ragas* and in the case where *raga* was not indicated Guru Arjan might have used his editorial prerogative to assign those verses to the appropriate *ragas*.

Following these thirty-one sections assigned to different *ragas*, we again have a section comprising miscellaneous compositions which are not assigned to any particular *raga* but have been composed in different poetic metres. This section (1353-1430) begins with the *Sahaskriti Slokas* by Guru Nanak (4) and Guru Arjan (67) and concludes with the *Ragmala*. In between these two compositions are placed the *banis* like *Gatha*, *Phunhe*, *Chaubole*, *slokas* by Kabir and Farid and *swaiyyas* both by the Gurus and various Bhatts.

"*Rahau*" has a very significant place in Gurmat music: that is why we find it used only in the compositions assigned to different *ragas*, and not in the others. It comprises the verse or verses which the singers repeat at regular intervals while singing the compositions wherein it occurs. It is also said that the verses titled "rahau" contain the central idea, the essence of the relevant compositions. The *Rahau* verses in the *Sukhmani* are generally believed to contain the essence of the *bani*. Similarly, the 'Rahau verses' in the beginning of the *Sidh Gosti* also reflect the author's ideology which stands resolved in the following text with the help of questions and answers. This can be illustrated by numerous examples from other compositions in the scripture. It has also been said that while explaining a hymn, one should begin with an explanation of the 'Rahau verse(s)': this would make the exegete's job much simpler and the listener will also be able to comprehend the meaning easily. There are hymns in the scripture which contain more than one *Rahau*. It has been explained that if there are two 'Rahau verses', the first one is the question and the second gives the answer. There are also instances of more than two verses of *Rahau* - actually they go up to six at some places. In all these cases the *Rahau* verses help us understand the relevant hymn. In the case of *vars*, *rahau* occurs only in one such var - *Var Ramkali Mahla III*, and here it is meant to be sung after the recitation of each stanza of the *var*.

Guru Arjan's *Mundavani*, is a sort of epilogue to the scripture. The exegetes have interpreted the word '*mundavani*' variously. Some take it to mean a riddle while more commonly it is taken as seal or stamp: by affixing his seal to the holy writ, the Guru precluded the possibility of any apocryphal additions. It has two parts: in the first part, the scripture has metaphorically been referred to as a salver containing three articles - truth, contentment and contemplation. Then the fourth viand is mentioned - the nectar of Name Divine which sustains all. He who partakes of this fare is saved. In the second part, there are two couplets by way of thanksgiving. Herein the Guru recites the praises while rendering his gratitude: 'Thou made me worthy of this task, Lord. I know not the limit of Thy favour. Meritless am I - without merit. That was thine own mercy....'

However, as it happens, the scripture in its present printed form concludes with the *Ragmala* which comes after the *Mundavani*: the authorship of the *Ragmala* has been a matter of controversy and how it came to be added to the scripture has so far remained a mystery. Of course, it has no thematical affinity or integrity with the other compositions included in the scripture, and it has no spiritual or instructional significance. The *Sikh Rahit Maryada* or the Sikh Code of Conduct which generally governs the Sikh way of life strangely refuses to take a clear position on the issue. It remains undecided on this vital issue but proclaims that the printed version of the scripture must carry at its end the *Ragmala*, though the question of its recitation along with the preceding hymns has been left to the local practice.

Guru Arjan who compiled the scripture has adopted a very meticulous method of numbering the hymns so as to negate every possibility of interpolation and to clarify the quantum of *bani* composed by a particular author in any given meter and *raga*. The system followed is so worked out that a monograph like this is not sufficient to explain, in some detail, all its intricacies and complexities.

Thus, an analysis of its structure reveals certain characteristic features of it such as its typical numbering of hymns so as to preclude any possibility of apocryphal interpolation; following the standard pattern of beginning with an invocation and concluding with a prayer of thanks giving; using the invocation at the beginning of each section and sub-section; introducing the subject-matter,

in the invocation, being dealt with in the coming pages; using a concluding hymn both as the seal beyond which nothing could be added and as a summary of the contents of the preceding volume; and so on. The scripture has since been acknowledged the medium of revelation that descended through the Gurus. All ideals, institutions and rituals of the Sikh faith derive their meaning from it. It makes and moulds the Sikh concept of life, is central to all that happens in the Sikh life and is the presiding deity in all Sikh shrines the world over.

Chapter V POET AND PHILOSOPHER

I

The contribution of Guru Arjan Dev to the Guru Granth Sahib has been more than that of any other: of the total 1430 pages of the standard printed edition of the scripture, his hymns put together would cover almost 650 pages and of the total thirty-one *ragas* or musical measures to which the entire corpus is assigned, the compositions of Guru Arjan Dev are in thirty *ragas*. He was not only a poet of great merit but also an editor with a sense of rare meticulousness and thoroughness. He was as good in poetics as he was in musicology. He was a mystic and spiritualist, but his compositions are not completely devoid of social praxis. He reflected deeply on the prevailing socio-religious situation and this situation gets clearly reflected in his poetic works. In other words, the human socio-religious situation is at the base of his poetic compositions and at the same time the improvement of the spiritual as well as social life of mankind so as to transform this mundane world into Sach Khand or the Realm of Truth also happens to be their object. This also implies that Guru Arjan, like any other great poet, was influenced by the contemporary milieu and at the same time he also deeply influenced the contemporary socio-spiritual life.

Broadly speaking, the total literary output of Guru Arjan Dev is 1345 *padas*, 62 *astpadis* and 62 *chhants*, 14 *solhe*, 20 *swaiyye* and more than four hundred *slokas* of which several have been included at different places in various *vars* included in the Guru Granth Sahib, some are included towards the end of the scripture and a few have been added at different places to the *slokas* of Kabir and Farid so as to explain or complement their meaning. Among his longer titled compositions are included six *vars* in Gauri, Gujari, Jaitsari, Ramkali, Maru and Basant measures, besides one *Barah Maha* in Majh measure, one *Bawan Akhari* in Gauri measure, *Sukhmani* in Gauri, *Thiti* in Gauri, *Pahre* in Sri raga, *Din Raini*

(Majh), *Birhare* (Asa), *Gunwanti* (Suhi), and *Anjulian* (Maru). There are some more longer titled compositions which are not assigned to any musical measure and are placed in the last part of the Guru Granth Sahib. They include *Salok Sahaskriti* (67), *Gatha* (24), *Phunhe* (23), *Chaubole* (11), and *Swaiyye* (20).

II

Var in Punjabi literature is a verse form which is popular in folklore as well as in refined poetry. In the old bardic tradition of the Punjab, the word *var* implies both the theme as well as the form in which that theme is cast. Originally, the *var* was written about battles and dynastic feuds, the issues of honour fought at the point of sword and the romantic love. These *vars* portrayed the chivalry and dauntless boldness shown in such a battle and bards sang these *vars* eulogizing these qualities of their patrons. It was a common practice among the feudal chiefs during medieval times to maintain hereditary bards whose one function was to compose and sing verses concerning the history of the family and valour shown by some of its members. This was invariably the theme of a *var* prior to Guru Nanak and we have several such secular *vars* in the post-Guru period as well.

However, the Sikh Gurus transformed the theme of *var* : the folk poetry got cast in a spiritual mould in the Sikh holy corpus. There are a total of twenty-two *vars* included in the Guru Granth Sahib of which one is by Satta and Balvand, two bards, and the remaining twenty-one are by the Gurus. Of these twenty-two *vars*, Guru Arjan has given at the head of nine *vars* the title of folk ballads indicating the tune to which the said *var* was to be sung. All these *vars* deal with spirituality: interestingly, the nine earlier *vars* named in the scripture with a view to give directions regarding the style in which some of the scriptural *vars* are to be sung are all martial in character. All the *vars* in the Guru Granth Sahib are written in *pauri* (stanza) meter and each of the stanzas is prefixed by some *slokas*: only the *var* in Basant measure by Guru Arjan and the *var* by Satta and Balvand in Ramkali measure are an exception wherein no *slokas* are prefixed to the stanzas. There are some *vars* which, as their titles suggest, had *slokas* written and added by the authors of the *pauris*, but in the case of others it was Guru Arjan who added *slokas* authored by various Gurus to the *pauris*. The theme of the stanzas and the *slokas* in the *vars* is identical. What is referred to briefly in the *slokas* is explained and

explicated in the following *pauri*.

The *var* Sri Bhagauti Ji Ki, popularly known as Chandi di *Var*, by Guru Gobind Singh as included in the *Dasam Granth*, was also composed with a view to infuse martial ardour among the followers. The *vars* by Bhai Gurdas which are part of the approved Sikh canon reiterate or explain in simple idiom what the Gurus had already said in their hymns as included in the Guru Granth Sahib. That is perhaps why they are called the key to the Guru Granth Sahib. In both these cases, however, the *pauris* of the *vars* do not have any *slokas* added to them. The *vars* in the Guru Granth Sahib generally depict the battle between the *gurmukh* or the forces of Good and the *manmukh* or the forces of Evil going on in human mind. In such a battle, it is only the *nam* or the remembrance of Name Divine which helps one overcome the forces of Evil.

Guru Arjan's contribution in this genre is six *vars*. His *Var* in measure Gauri comprises twenty-one stanzas and it carries at its head the direction as to the tune in which it should most appropriately be sung : the tune indicated is that of the then popular ballad, *Rai Kamaldi Mojdi Var*, which recounted the valour of Mojdi (Muazz ud-Din) in a fight against his Muslim Rajput uncle Kamaldi (Kamal ud-Din). It begins with the eulogy of the non-dual One who is creator of as well as immanent in all the created beings. Man is advised to love and remember the Name Divine in the company of the holy to realize oneness with Him. This mystical oneness with God removes all psychic conflicts and man ever abides in bliss. However, man unfortunately neglects soul's yearning for union with Lord, rather seeks material and physical satisfaction in self-indulgence. This makes man look happy outwardly, but he is full of anxiety within. Only the remembrance of Name Divine can save man from this anxiety, unhappiness and discontent and lead him to his spiritual objective.

His another *Var* in Gujri measure also has twenty-one stanzas, and herein the stanzas generally eulogize the Guru and God whereas the *slokas* refer to human limitations and to the role of Guru's grace in overcoming those limitations. In general, the *Var* lauds the Creator-Lord and proclaims that this manifest world is not unreal: since God is immanent in the creation, the latter cannot be unreal or *maya*. God has no co-equal or co-eternal: all gods,

goddesses and scriptures sing His praises. Man is also advised to remember God, participate in the *sangat* or congregation and perform good deeds to become the object of divine grace. Only such a person is able to eradicate his ego which otherwise makes man ever suffer in the process of transmigration.

The *Var* in Jaitsari measure comprises twenty stanzas, with two *slokas* preceding each stanza: of these two *slokas*, the language of the first one is Prakrit whereas the second is in western or Multani dialect of Punjabi language. The theme referred to briefly in the *slokas* is duly explained in the following stanza which is in central Punjabi. All the stanzas as well as the *slokas* are the authorship of Guru Arjan. Traditionally, during the courses of an *akhand path* or uninterrupted reading of the scripture, as the *granthi* or reader reaches this text, *ardas* or prayer is said for having reached midway in the recitation of the entire scripture. Earlier, this *Var* used to be recited at the conclusion of the death ceremonies also, but this is rarely done these days.

In this *Var* the Guru exhorts man to remember and eulogize God who is the creator of and pervades all created phenomena. He also advises man not to get engrossed in the transitory material attractions, rather he should concentrate on Name Divine because the latter is the source of all comfort and joy. The company of the holy or *satsangat* helps man remember God whereas indulgence in worldly things makes one forgetful of God. None of the worldly possessions which man acquires through indulgence in various sinful and false means will be of any help to him hereafter. Man should ever be thoughtful of the Giver rather than getting attached to the gifts. The *Var* makes a beautiful comparison of spirituality and materialism and advises man to follow the former path. The *Var* also expresses the might of the divine law of retribution and proclaims that every individual is judged according to the deeds he does during his lifetime - *jaisa bijai so lunai karam ehu khetu* - one reaps what one sows, this is the field of action.

The fourth *Var* by Guru Arjan is in Ramkali measure and comprises twenty-two stanzas, with two *slokas* preceding each stanza. All the stanzas as well as the *slokas* are from the pen of Guru Arjan Dev. However, four of the *slokas*, though authored by the Guru, address themselves to the views of Kabir (2) and Farid (2). The language of the stanzas is central Punjabi whereas the *slokas* have sprinklings here and there of Hindi, Persian and

western dialect of Punjabi. In these *slokas*, the Guru eulogies the holy and criticizes the *manmukh* and the ritualistic. They also sing the significance of Name and love in human heart and make a criticism of hypocrisy. The *Var* brings out beautifully the immense and unfathomable greatness of Creator-Lord and the smallness of the individual being in the inverse proportion. The Name Divine is the only true friend of man as it is the only means to help man get united with the Lord whereas all worldly attractions and allurements are false as they cause man's bondage and consequent transmigration. The former are the objects of His grace and thus they are ever in bliss and they need fear none. God is unfathomable and unattainable, and cannot be realized either through weeping or wailing or through mechanical reading of scriptures or through pilgrimages and ritual bathing or through any intellectual jargon. On the other hand, all the created beings are functioning under His will. It is only through remembrance of His Name that man can achieve mystical oneness with Him.

The fifth *Var*, in the Maru measure, comprises twenty-three stanzas, with three *slokas*, here called *dakhne*, attached to each stanza. Both the stanzas and the *dakhne* are the work of Guru Arjan Dev. The word *dakhne* literally implies the *slokas* written in the dialect of Punjabi which was spoken in the southern parts of Punjab, that is from Multan to the Sakhar-Sind areas. However, the language of the stanzas is Punjabi under the fair influence of Sadh Bhakha. Broadly speaking, the *dakhne* express the author's feelings of love whereas the stanzas sing the eulogies of the Lord.

The *Var* primarily presents a spiritual vision of God and the operation of moral law and advises man to express devotion to Him. God is the sole creator of the entire manifest world and He is also immanent in His creation. He is eternal and beyond *kal* whereas all the created beings are subject to decay and death. He has no form and He is not limited to any class or category : He is all-pervasive. However, man engrossed in his ego forgets the Lord and suffers. Man can realize God only by discarding the ego which denudes man of all his spirituality. Proud of his worldly possessions, man becomes forgetful of God. He can get rid of his ego and realize God only by taking shelter in the Guru's Word. Neither renunciation of the world nor any particular garb, neither fasts nor ritual bathing at pilgrimage centers, neither mechanical reading of scriptures nor intellectual exercise, neither rituals nor

formalism can help man in this regard: householder's life is no hindrance and only constant remembrance of His name can be helpful.

The sixth *Var*, in Basant measure, is the only *var* in the Guru Granth Sahib which has no *slokas* prefixed to its stanzas. Comprising just three stanzas, it is also the smallest in size. It also presents side by side Creator and the created being (man), suggesting that just as Spring is the season for flowers to bloom, human life is the opportunity for man to remember Name Divine and realize oneness with Him. The first stanza depicts the influence of Spring on the manifest world as well as of the divine grace on man. It is with the grace of God that man has been able to overcome the 'enemies' like lust, wrath, greed, attachment and ego. Those who overpower these enemies get liberated from the process of birth-death-rebirth (2). The Lord-God is the creator of all and He subsumes all unto Himself in the end. The fortunate ones sing eulogies of such a Lord and live ever in bliss (3).

III

Besides the *Vars*, *Sukhmani* is a very significant work among the other longer compositions of the Guru. It comprises twenty-four cantos, each comprising eight stanzas composed in *chaupai* metre. A *sloka* or couplet precedes each canto. Since the word *Sukhmani* in Punjabi means 'the consoler of the mind', the work has variously been translated into English under the titles such as Psalm of Peace or Song of Peace, signifying the soothing effect it has on the mind of the reader. The *rahau* couplet in almost every composition in the Guru Granth Sahib sums up the most characteristic feature of that composition. In the *Sukhmani*, the *rahau* couplet implies that it is the bringer of the bliss of the Lord's name; it dwells in the hearts of those who love Him. The first seven stanzas of each of the cantos explore the theme stated in the preceding *sloka* and the eighth stanza sometimes sums up the canto but more often praises the Lord placing the theme in the context of an overall vision of God. Since *Sukhmani* presents a complete scheme of the teachings of the Sikh faith, it has become one of the fundamental texts of the Sikhs and the Sikh faith.

No doubt, each canto of the *Sukhmani* unfolds a particular aspect of Truth, yet in its entirety the composition addresses itself to the themes of unity of Reality, divine immanence, divine grace and compassion, merit of devotion, participation in congregation

and virtues like humility, and so on. The opening invocation calls God as *adi gure, jugadi gure, satigure* and *sri gurdev* (Primal Preceptor, Preceptor from the beginning of the time existing, True Preceptor and Preceptor Divine). Man is advised to remember this Lord because it is the only way to link up his consciousness with the Divine. Name is the true helper and friend, true conferrer of joy and bliss as against one's trust in yogic austerities, ascetic practices and ritual worship. In fact, the first six cantos stress on man the significance of Name Divine and also highlight the suffering of man who is forgetful of God and indifferent to humanity as well as the blissful state enjoyed by one who ever remembers Name .

The following five cantos (7-11) deal with the concept of the ideal man called *brahmgiyani, gurmukh* and *jivan-mukta* whereas cantos 12 to 20 stress the significance of *sadhna* or discipline for the spiritual progression of man. One must not be self-conceited and one must never slander a saint: he who slanders a saint is called the worst evil-doer bereft of all spiritual blessing. The last four (21-24) cantos delineate the absolute powers of God who is said to be the sole creator of all that exists in this universe, whom none can fathom, who loves all and feels rancour toward none, and through whose *hukam* and grace man attains true wisdom. Thus, the *Sukhmani* is a theological statement of the major tenets of the Sikh faith expressed in a devotional poetic form.

IV

Another longer titled composition of Guru Arjan Dev is *Barah Maha* in Majh measure. As a literary genre, *Barah Maha* is a form of folk poetry which expresses emotions and yearnings of the human heart in terms of the changing moods of nature over the twelve months (*barah* in Punjabi means twelve and *maha* means month) of Indian calendar. In this genre the moods of nature are described month-wise which symbolise the mood or inner agony of the human heart or more precisely the love-stricken woman separated from her lover/husband. In other words, the poet tries to read the human feelings reflected in the different faces of nature. Many poets in Sanskrit, Hindi and other languages have composed poems in this genre. In the Guru Granth Sahib also, there are two compositions under this title, one by Guru Nanak and the second by Guru Arjan. However, in the scriptural literature, the *jiva* or human being is called wife or beloved vis-a-vis God who is called

the Lover or Husband: the former, separated from the latter, yearns for union with Him.

In the Sanskrit literature, it has been called *shad ritu varnan* (*shad*=six; *ritu*=seasons; and *varnan*=description), and the most well known example of this genre has been Kalidas' *Ritu Sanhar*. In the medieval Indian literature, this genre remained quite popular. In the Hindi literature, the first such work has been cited as Malik Muhammad Jayasi's *Padamavat*. Guru Nanak's *Barah Maha*, in Tukhari measure, has been the oldest composition belonging to this genre in Punjabi literature. It was also in the hands of Guru Nanak that its theme of love poetry got transformed into that of spiritual import. In his works, human soul became the chief protagonist which got caught in the process of transmigration and suffered, yearning to get united with the Absolute One after getting release from this bondage. Guru Arjan's *Barah Maha* also falls in this category.

Guru Arjan's *Barah Maha*, known for its philosophical import as well as its poetic splendour, comprises fourteen stanzas of which the first and the last serve as prologue and epilogue, respectively, whereas the remaining twelve, beginning serially with the name of the month, depict through the moods of nature over the twelve months the pangs of the bride (individual soul) separated from her Divine Lover. The Guru has tried to reflect the individual soul's yearning in relation to the mood of nature in a particular month yet all months and implicitly all days and hours are proclaimed auspicious for those who have earned the grace of the Lord. It is this divine grace coupled with human initiative which helps break the web of transmigration and win acceptance in the Divine Court. Philosophically, the composition stresses the fundamental Sikh metaphysical doctrine of the oneness of God and His presence in each being and at all places while at the same time remaining unfathomable and unknowable. His transcendent as well as immanent nature implies there is no essential gap between the Creator and the creation. It is only the egoist human mind which sees the self apart from its ontological core. Thus, the Sikh spiritual objective is proclaimed to be the "mystic unity" rather than the "physical merger": it is the realization of the Absolute One within oneself. One can do so while still participating in life of familial and social obligations.

The prologue depicts individual soul's sense of grief as its

separation from its original Source, and also expresses its feeling of submission to God so as to realize union with Him and thus get rid of this grief. A human life not given to Name Divine is as useless as the cow without milk and the crop sans any yield caused by the lack of rains. All comforts and pleasures of the world are futile if man is not at peace which is attainable only through the benefits one reaps by ever remembering Him. Devotion to God saves man from all pain and suffering and His grace brings him eternal bliss. For such blessed persons, all days and months are equally auspicious.

Each of the twelve stanzas in between relates to a month of the Indian calendar, beginning with the first, Chet. Chet is the month of Spring with beautiful flowers blooming all around. Man feels immensely pleased looking at such beautiful scenario. Similarly, remembrance of Name Divine gives one immense pleasure, but it is only in the company of the holy that one gets the gift of Name (2). The next stanza, beginning with the second month, called Vaisakh, depicts the emotions of a 'woman' for her 'Spouse', but those who are separated from their Spouse and those who have no love in their hearts for Him ever remain restless. Unfortunately, man forgetful of God tries to find joy in the things of the world, but only those enjoy the beauty of Vaisakh and bliss in life who attain union with the Spouse, i.e. God (3). Jeth is the month to unite with the Divine, but unfortunately man wastes away his life in the acquisition of worldly possessions. Those who are fortunate enough to receive the Guru's guidance and grace of God are able to realize God and win acceptance and appreciation at the Divine Court (4). In the heat of Asar/Har, only they suffer who are separated from their Spouse. Those who remember God in the company of the holy enjoy bliss and those who, in their ego, become forgetful of Him suffer (5). In the following month of Sawan begins the rainy season which turns the surroundings all green. Those who are attuned to God are as alive and happy as Nature during the season. Sawan brings joy to those who have Name Divine residing in their hearts (6). Just as Bhadon, the sixth month of the Indian calendar, is humid and harrowing, the individual souls not attuned with God suffer. One must reap as one sows in this life - *jeha bijai so lunai karma sandara khetu*. Those who seek shelter with Him get saved (7). The weather in the month of Assu is quite pleasant, producing in the seeker-woman

the desire to meet the Lover-God. The keenness for this union is beautifully described and the joy of union is proclaimed to be better than any worldly taste (8). Again, the month of Kartik describes the suffering, weeping and wailing of those separated from their spouse. Remembrance of Name Divine in the company of the holy can only put an end to this separation (9). Beautiful are those who are united with their spouses whereas those in separation fall prey to many 'enemies' (evils) and suffer (10). The cold weather of Poh is not felt by one with her Spouse. She is blessed by God and to her even the cold month of Poh is pleasant (11). In Indian tradition, the first day of Magh is considered auspicious and people visit various places of pilgrimage for ritual bathing. However, Guru Arjan advises man to 'bathe in the dust of the feet of the holy'. Company of such holy people erases all evil tendencies and helps one to move ahead on the path of spirituality (12). In the last and twelfth month of Phagun, the winter is again replaced by Spring and the Nature is once again in a joyous mood. Those who realize God through the company of the holy feel the same joy in their hearts. God is unfathomable and those who submit to Him swim across the world ocean (13).

V

Bawan Akhari, another literary genre which traces its origin to the Sanskrit literature, is constructed upon the *bavan* or fifty-two *akhar* or letters of Devnagri script. Each stanza of this composition should normally begin serially with a letter of the Devnagri alphabet, but notwithstanding this nomenclature none of the extant compositions in this genre comprise exactly fifty-two stanzas: it is not possible to open a stanza with a vowel and a conjunct and sometimes a letter is used to open more than one stanza.

There are in the Guru Granth Sahib two compositions by this nomenclature - one by Kabir and the other by Guru Arjan. The *Bawan Akhari*, by Guru Arjan, is in Gauri measure and comprises fifty-five stanzas, each of them preceded by some *slokas*. All the letters, especially the vowels and conjuncts in Devnagri cannot be used in the Gurmukhi script: only twenty-nine consonants in Gurmukhi conform to those in Devnagri and stanzas 17-46 begin with these consonants, except that *m* figures twice. The opening sixteen and the concluding nine stanzas do not follow the serial order of either Devnagri or Gurmukhi script. The central theme is

the attainment of the dust of the feet of the holy through the divine grace. One can achieve the divine grace only through the help and guidance of the Guru who brings purity to the life of the seeker and helps man tread the path of spirituality. *Satsang* or company of the holy is a pre-requisite for the spiritual journey, and that is why the primary human objective has been declared as the attainment of the dust of the feet of the holy. In the process, the composition brings out the concept, role and significance of the Guru and advises man to save himself from evils by the remembrance of Name Divine and participating in the *satsangat*.

VI

Guru Arjan's *Ruti*, *Thiti*, *Din Raini* and *Pahre* are the titled though not very long compositions and all are in the prosodic vogue of inscribing verses to *kal-krama* (process of time). All these compositions emphasise the need to remember and eulogize the Lord through all the *thitti*, also written as *thittin*, or days/dates, *ruti* or seasons, *din raini* or days and nights and *pahar* or hours/time. The Brahmanical ritualism considers certain dates/seasons/days/moments of time more auspicious than others, and the auspicious days, etc. are considered more appropriate to worship and eulogize God. The Sikh Gurus tried to undo such superstitious beliefs and with this object proclaimed that all the hours, days, dates and seasons are the creation of God and are thus equally auspicious. Guru Arjan's *Ruti*, in Ramkali measure, comprises eight *chhants* or six-line stanzas, with two *slokas* prefixed to each of the stanzas. The *slokas* here have been used to introduce the theme which finds elaboration in the following stanza. The composition delineates the seeker's longing for the Lord and the bliss he experiences on attaining union with Him and this union, attained through remembrance of Name Divine, makes all the seasons and months and days and hours delightful for him: change in seasons does not affect him or his mood.

His *Thitti*, in Gauri measure and comprising seventeen *pauris* or stanzas with each stanza preceded by a *sloka*, is also aimed at removing the superstition that certain days/dates are more auspicious than others. The *rahau* verses sum up the primary theme of the composition as singing eulogies of the Lord in the company of the holy, and this theme has been repeatedly explained in the context of dates. Proceeding from the *ekam* or the first day of the waning half of the lunar month, the composition goes on

till the amavas or the last day of the dark half of the month and thereafter refers to the *puranmashi/purnima* or the full-moon day. Throughout these stanzas, the devotion to and meditation on Name Divine are stressed as highly prized values because they eradicate ego and other evils from human mind. Everybody, irrespective of his caste or creed, can attain liberation through Name Divine. The belief that certain lunar days associated with some deity or god/goddess/incarnation are more propitious than the others is rejected: all days are auspicious if devoted to God's remembrance and to good deeds. Guru Nanak and Kabir have also composed hymns under the same title, the former's is assigned to Bilawal measure and the latter's to measure Gauri.

The composition *Pahre*, in Siri measure, is a small composition comprising only five stanzas of six lines each. Herein man has been advised with the help of a metaphor of *vanjara* or trader to be honest in his social dealings and behaviour, and traverse life always mindful of the Creator, the union with whom is his ultimate objective. Each of the five stanzas deal with man's entire life from his birth till death - his birth and childhood; his youth when he in his ego loses the sense of discrimination between good and bad; mature age when he gets engrossed in the affairs of the world and forgets the Lord; old age when death approaches and when man feels anxious to remember God so as to improve his chances in the next birth; death overtakes man who departs from this world leaving behind all worldly possessions. Those who had remembered God all the time successfully swim across the world-ocean whereas those given only to worldly pleasures and temptations suffer in the process of transmigration. There are two more compositions of the same title, one by Guru Nanak and the other by Guru Ram Das.

Guru Arjan's *Din-Raini*, in Majh measure, comprising only four stanzas of varying length, is another composition following the prosodic vogue of inscribing verses to the process of time. It delineates all the good, noble deeds which man ought to do day and night to realize God and to make his life a success. The Guru, as says the composition, is sacrifice unto those who remember and serve God day and night.

The other titled compositions of Guru Arjan include *Birhare* (in Asa measure), *Gunwanti* (in Suhi measure) and *Anjulian* (in Maru measure). The word *birhara* or *birha* in Punjabi means

separation or pangs of separation, and there are folk songs under this nomenclature depicting with deep intensity and feeling one's pangs of separation from and the keenness to be one with his or her lover. The composition of Guru Arjan depicts individual soul's yearning for union with the Lord separate from whom it has been suffering. *Gunwanti*, literally a virtuous woman, is a term which Guru Arjan has figuratively used, in his composition of the same name, for a true and meritorious devotee. According to this composition, the virtues which a true Sikh must imbibe include humility, respect for others, desire for the company of the holy (*satsangat*), abandonment of pride and all temptation, and subservience to the will of God. He who follows the path of righteousness will never experience pain or grief. The *Anjulian* by Guru Arjan Dev is a short composition comprising two hymns (GGS, 1007-8 and 1019) and is by way of a prayer to God seeking from Him the gift of Name. The word *anjuli* (plural *anjulian*) is of Sanskrit origin which implies the joining together of palms in supplication or salutation. Man gives himself completely to worldly acquisitions under the mistaken notion that he can get pleasure only out of his material possessions. This only adds to his misery. Everything in this world happens in His will and man is thus advised to ever remember Him in the company of the holy. It also rejects the ritual of *anjuli* as libation to the manes and teaches man to willingly accept the Divine *hukam*.

VII

No, doubt, it was Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, who articulated all the fundamental concepts and doctrines of the Sikh faith. The following Gurus explained and elaborated them, and set up and nurtured certain institutions so as to make them a part of the life of their followers. However, the contribution of the later Gurus cannot be under-estimated. Guru Arjan's contribution towards the doctrinal and institutional strengthening of the faith has been very significant. He gave to the Sikhs their holy Book, now called the Guru Granth Sahib, their central place of worship, the Harimandar (popularly called Darbar Sahib but known as the Golden Temple among the people of the west), and became the first martyr in the Sikh tradition having laid down his life for the freedom of faith and against religious intolerance and fanaticism. We agree with the observation that the 'work of the

first four Gurus was preparatory and it assumed a more definitive form in the hands of Guru Arjan Dev. The later Gurus substantiated the principles manifested in the life of Guru Arjan Dev who thus marked a central point in the evolution of the Sikh tradition'.

In Sikhism the supreme Reality is revealed through the revelatory experiences of the Gurus who had the first-hand experience of It in their mystic state of consciousness. For them, God is self-evident, and thus no proof or effort is required to prove or establish the divine existence. Guru Arjan Dev makes it rather explicit when he says that God has been apparently obvious - *nanak ka patisah disai jahara*. Guru Gobind Singh, in his *Japu* which forms part of the daily regimen of prayers of a Sikh, also emphasizes that God is *hajra hajur* and *zahra zahur*, i.e. apparently obvious. The Gurus take God to be so obvious, so outstandingly visible that they make no effort, rather feel no need, to prove His existence. God is perceived to be manifest in all the material phenomena around us, present in all the directions and at all the places. However, this does not equate God with or limit Him to the manifest material phenomena. The latter are in essence divine but they fail to contain the Divine in Its entirety. Guru Arjan says:

Manifests in water and at land, the Creator Master;

Says Nanak: One Formless manifests Himself in varied forms.

- Guru Granth Sahib, V, 296

The Sikh Gurus lay much emphasis on the unity of Reality: plurality of deities is straightaway rejected. The scripture opens with the term *ikoankar*, a term which occurs many times in the following text. The frequent use of the term is suggestive of the significant and central place the concept of the unity of God occupies in Sikh ontology. The term *ikoankar* is, in fact, a compound of three words, i.e. *ik*, *oan* (or *om*) and *kar*. The word *oan* or *om* stands for the supreme Reality. In the Upanisadic literature also, the word *om* has been used to convey the means of meditation as well as the object of it: here the word describes both the supreme means of meditation and the goal to be reached by the meditation itself. The Sikh Gurus have invariably used the word with the prefix '*ik*' and suffix '*kar*'. In fact, the prefix '*ik*' is not a word, but is a numeral and as such is very specific and certain in its meaning. There can never be any ambiguity about the meaning of a numeral whereas different words or phrases could be interpreted differently by different persons to give them

different meanings. On the other hand, the meaning of a numeral is ever fixed for all. Guru Nanak has therefore used the prefix '*ik*' to emphasize the oneness, non-duality of God. The addition of prefix '*ik*' by Guru Nanak to the Hindu term *oan* or *om* is significant as the Sikh perception of God is unitary as against the Hindu belief in the plurality of Godhead. Obviously, this is also against the *sramanic* tradition which altogether denies the existence of God.

The use of suffix '*kar*' to '*oan*' is not a new innovation in Sikhism as it had already been used in some Upanisadic literature as well. However, the use is significant as it implies creation, thereby bringing about the *sagun* aspect of the transcendent, *nirgun* God. This suffix is indicative of the creative aspect of God who does not remain static but becomes dynamic as creator and sustainer of the manifest material world. There have been numerous references in the scripture suggesting the creative aspect of Reality: God has been referred to as Karta Purakh who, of His own will and from His own self, has created the entire manifest phenomena.

Thus, the term *ikoankar* means the non-dual unity of God (*ik*) which was earlier in unmanifest state (*oan*) but later on willed Himself to manifestation or creation (*kar*). The term in this sense also happens to occupy a three-dimensional connotation. One, it stresses the unity, the oneness of the metaphysical Reality called God. The manifest reality in all its plurality must not be taken as duality. Second, it refer to the unmanifest, formless (*nirankar*, *nirgun*) state which is also called the impersonal unity of Reality. Third, it points to the creative aspect of Reality, implying His manifestation, qua spirit, in all beings and at all places. In other words, we can also say that *ikoankar* stands for the non-dual dynamic God who wills Himself from Being to Becoming, and thus becomes transcendent as well as immanent. Guru Arjan also says that it is the same formless God who manifests Himself in diverse forms in the mundane world (GGS, V, 296).

In Hinduism there is a trinity of gods - Brahma, Visnu and Siva - which is responsible, respectively, for the creation, preservation and destruction of all that exists in this universe. Unlike this, the Sikh Gurus have perceived the Real One as the one spiritual continuum solely responsible for the creation, preservation and possible re-absorption unto Himself of the entire

manifest phenomena. Thus, they perceive Him as transcendent as well as immanent, stressing equally on both the aspects and declaring that neither aspect is more important than the other. They are also quite specific in their reiteration that this immanence of God in the plurality of beings and things of the material world does not in any way affect either its unitary character or its transcendent nature. God in His unmanifest state is transcendent as well as *nirgun*: in this state, He is beyond human comprehension. But when He manifests Himself, *qua* spirit, in the material phenomena, He becomes immanent as well as *sagun*: it is this aspect of God that we as humans try to understand. Since the entire manifest phenomena does not exhaust God in His entirety, the human understanding of Him is ever incomplete. That is perhaps why Guru Nanak in his *Mul Mantra* while giving different attributive names of God calls him Karta Purakh (Creator Being). However, the Sikh conception of *purakh* is different from that of the *purusha* of the Sankhya-yoga system: the latter is not only inactive but is also dualistic from *prakriti*, but the former here is active and internally related to the nature or *qudrat*. He is the dynamic principle and the *qudrat* or nature is His manifest form, the immanent aspect of the transcendent Karta (Creator).

This self-manifestation of God is under the self-regulative cosmic principle (*hukm*), and can be seen in the whole of the creation. All the creatures born of seed (*setaj*), egg (*andaj*), foetus (*jeraj*) and earth (*utbhuj*), all the four directions, the earth and the sky, day and night, and the sun and the moon all emanate from Him. The Lord is present (in spirit, though) on the earth and in the sea and everywhere else: the Creator-Lord can be perceived in the multiplicity of creation yet He retains His unity, says Guru Arjun. The Lord pervades all (*ravi rahia sarbatra mai*) and man should ever remember Him. His light pervades all human souls (GS, V, 294). Just as fire is latent in all Nature and ghee is latent in all milk, the same Lore, the same Light pervades all beings, high as well as low, says Guru Arjun (GGS, V, 517). He creates all, nourishes all and finally reabsorbs all unto Himself - *sagali banat banai ape/ape kare karae thape/ikasu te hoio ananta nanak ekasu mahi samae jiu* (GGS, V, 131), Guru Gobind Singh also stresses the point as he says, in his *Akal Ustati*, that the Real One is immanent in all beings and at all places - *sarab joti ke bich samana/sabhahun sarab thaur pahichana*. However, this multiple

manifestation does not affect or change God's unitary character - *ek hain anek hain/anek hain phiri ek hain* (God is one (*ik*) but He becomes visible in a variety of material forms (*anek*); despite this multiplicity of manifestation, He is ever One).

The essential oneness of the creation and the Creator leaves no place for dualism. The Gurus reject both the static metaphysical system of Vedanta and the Semitic concept of the transcendental (impersonal) nature of God. The Sankhya theory of dualism between Purusa and Prakriti is also rejected. Unlike these metaphysical systems, the Sikh dynamic ontology, on the one hand, encompasses the 'otherness' of created elements within the all-comprehensive structure of non-dual Real One, and on the other, identifies with Himself, *qua* spirit, all sentient and non-sentient elements. These latter are visualized as manifest units of the Real One. Thus, the entire manifest phenomena become intrinsically one with God and are realized as a relative reality.

The inherent potentiality of self-manifestation of God does not restrict itself to the act of creation alone, but also extends to the preservation and destruction as well. He creates, preserves and finally reabsorbs everything unto Himself. As for God being the preserver of His creation, we find in the Guru Granth Sahib various attributes used for Him indicating His concern, love, justice and compassion for His creation. He has been given various epithets taken from familial relations such as *mata* (mother), *pita* (father), *sakha* (friend), *data* (giver), *palak* or *palanhar* (preserver), *piara* (the loved one), and so on: in our mundane life all these relations are supposed to bring us up and take care of our wellbeing. This creator and preserver God is also the destroyer of all that He creates. All the different forms and shapes emanate from Him and finally submerge within Him. The metaphor repeatedly used in the Sikh scripture is that of the waves which arise from water and ultimately merge in it. Guru Gobind Singh, in his *Akal Ustati*, uses an extended metaphor to explain this relationship between *jivatma* (individual soul) and *paramatma* (supreme Soul):

As out of a single fire
Millions of sparks arise;
Arise in separation
But come together again
When they fall back in fire.

As from a heap of dust
 Grains of dust swept up
 Fill the air, and filling it
 Fall in the heap of dust.

As from a single stream
 Countless waves rise up;
 And, being water, fall
 Back in water again.

So from God's form emerge
 Alive and inanimate things;
 And since they rise from Him,
 They shall fall in Him again.

Let it also be made explicit that this divine manifestation, preservation and re-absorption is not selective: it is universal. His spirit permeates through all and He is inseparable (*abigami*) from His creation.

God is, no doubt, creator of everything, but He himself is self-existent and self-effulgent. He was in existence when none else existed: other creation came into existence when the unmanifest, impersonal God willed self-manifestation. In Sikh philosophy, this process has been called a transformation from being or pure consciousness to becoming or manifestation in real historical time. Thus, the entire manifest phenomena including man and all other forms are a part of this becoming. In the scripture, He has been called *saibhan* or self-created. Though everything else has His spirit (*joti*) manifested in it, no other or outside spirit manifests in Him. He has no father or mother as we normal human beings have, and he depends on no outside source for His existence. He was when nothing else existed except chaos and darkness, He is and He shall ever be - *sargun nirgun nirankar sunn samadhi api/apan kia nanaka ape hi phiri japi* (GGS, V, 290). Another allied term with *saibhan* that is used for God is *ajuni* which means unborn or unincarnated. He is never born in human or any other form. He is free from the cycle of transmigration. He is neither born nor dies; the Lord of Nanak pervades all (*janami na marai na avai na jai/nanak ka prabhu rahio samai*), says Guru Arjan (GGS, V, 1136).

We have learnt that God is the sole creator and all else is His creation. The creator-creation relationship has in the scripture been suggested by the examples of sea water and waves, sun and sun rays, and so on. The waves can never become equal to the sea and the rays can never equal the sun, similarly the creation is ever subservient to the creator: the former cannot become equal to Him. Thus, God is all-powerful, unequalled and there is absolutely no check on Him except His own self-regulative creative principle (*hukm*). He does not depend on anything else for His existence and survival. He is without any rivals (*nirsarik*) and without any relations (*nirsak*). Therefore, He fears none (fearless or *nirbhau*). Since He has created the entire world of phenomena, the created beings are His own children who ever function under His will. He need not have enmity towards His own children, rather He has, in the scriptural hymns, been called 'master of the patrons of the poor and the hapless' - *anath nath nath hai*. This perception of God as fearless and rancourless is unlike the anthropomorphic and polytheistic tribal gods of the earlier Indian tradition. These latter are found many times engrossed in mutual enmity and hatred. In Hindu mythology also, we find many gods either in fear of some other god/demon or trying to hold others in fear. Sometimes these gods are also shown as in fear of and even defeated by the demonic forces. However, the Sikh concept of God takes Him above these sectarian and tribal considerations and rather makes Him belong to the entire creation: He is immanent in the whole of mankind, the high as well as the low, and feels for the whole of it.

God in Sikh metaphysical thought is also called *akal* (*akal* means beyond and not subject to *kal*, i.e. time and death) *murati* (being). The word *kal* means time and death, and the addition of the prefix *a* to it on the one hand turns the noun into adjective and on the other gives it a negative connotation, thus implying one beyond and not subject to *kal*. God of the Sikh conception had been before time, is beyond time and will ever be. Unlike all other created beings who in their embodied form exist in historical time are subject to death and decay, God never gets embodied as He is never born in any form and is beyond all these limitations. In other words, God in his unmanifest, impersonal aspect transcends *kal* but His manifestations are immanent in time. Let its be stressed here that God transcends temporality and encompasses *kal*, but it is neither exclusive of time nor timeless, rather it subsumes *kal*,

Guru Arjan says that God is never subject to death or destruction - *akal murati jisu kade nahi khau* (GGS, V, 1092).

Such a non-dual and dynamic God has been called Satinam, a term which combined two words, i.e. *sati* (literally, true or truth) and *nam* (name). It has been interpreted as the 'manifestation of the Indeterminate Absolute as determinate Infinity in the creative act as spirit.' Also, *nam* is a primordial *sakti* which is the material and efficient cause of the manifest world, and such a *sakti* is naturally *sati* or true. In fact, in Sikh metaphysics, *nam* is the divine cause of manifestation, means for truth-realization (*nam-simran*) as well as the Truth itself (*sati-namu*). It has been the only food on which the saintly feed themselves, says the scripture.

Such God can only be realized through the grace of the Guru. The word Guru here does not stand for any personal *guru*, but for the Primal Lord: it can also be given the name of *sabda brahman* or the Divine Word, and thus referring to the impersonal aspect of God. *Sabda* is the creative principle which acts upon the consciousness of man leading him on the way to spiritual development and ultimately to God-realization. This process of self-development (spiritual as well as ethico-moral) constitutes the realm of grace when the individual will become attuned to the will of God and thus realize Him. Guru Arjan also says that enlightenment comes only with the grace of God and that man can control his mind only when God shows His grace to him (GGS, V, 271, 292).

Some of the earlier Indian religious traditions negate the self as well as the world: they held man and the manifest material world as unreal, calling it *mithia* or *maya*. They also advised man to free himself from its snare so as to get united with the Absolute One. This world and worldly life were considered a hindrance in the way to God-realization: in fact, freedom from this snare was considered a pre-requisite to accomplish the spiritual ideal of human life. On the other hand, the Sikh scripture, based as it is on the intuitive experiences of the Gurus, presents a different world-view. According to this world-view, the mundane world and all the beings who inhabit it including man are in essence one with God: the immanence of God in all the creation lends it a spiritual nature. Since the entire phenomena is the creation of God, the entire created phenomena is true because it is created by the True

One, says Guru Arjan (GGS, V, 294). The creation no more remains an independent entity distinct from God, rather it gets identified with God's self-revelation. Thus, the earlier idea of this material manifest world being *mithia* or *maya* which hinders man's spiritual progression stands negated. The world no more need be renounced, says the scripture. On the other hand, we can see the dominant overtones of divinizing the mundane domesticity by declaring this mundane world as the abode of the Lord.

Both man and matter are not, according to the Sikh scripture, illusions: they are realities, relative realities though. Man is not only the central figure in the whole universe but is also the supreme creation among the numberless creations of God: all other species are subordinate to man who is the supreme creation on this earth, says Guru Arjan (*avar joni teri panihari/is dharati mahi teri sikdari*, GGS, V, 374). His status is the highest and he is at the head of all living beings: all other beings are subordinate to him - even the gods long to be born as humans, says the scripture. Man is called the supreme being because only he has the consciousness to discriminate (*bibek*) between good and evil. That is why human life has been called the only opportunity to realize the Lord - *bhai parapati manukh dehuria/gobind milan ki ih teri baria* (GGS, V, 12). This consciousness is a pre-requisite to reach the stage of self-realization or God-realization. All religions and philosophies revolve round him, and no religion or philosophy can exist or be complete without referring to, analyzing and establishing the nature and purpose of human life.

As for the creation of this manifest mundane world, the scripture says that in the beginning there was complete darkness, and nothing existed except God:

In the beginning there was indescribable darkness;

There was neither earth nor heaven,

Nothing but God's unequalled Being.

There was neither day nor night, nor moon nor sun;

God alone was there in a meditative mood.

There was no source of life, voices, wind or water,

Neither creation nor destruction, nor coming nor going.

....

....

....

There was no Brahma, Visnu or Siva,

None existed but the One Lord.

Complete absence of any material *a priori* to the creation of

this material world supports the theory that God constructed the world and all that inhabits it out of His own self and of His own will. When the Divine will began to work and how it operates is not known to any human mind: only He-who created it knows - *thiti var na jogi janai ruti mahu na koi/ja karta sirathi kau saje ape janai soi*. Guru Arjan also says that only the Creator, and none else, knows the mysteries of creation (GGS, V, 285). However, when God created this world, He made Himself immanent in it. His immanence in the mundane world results in the spiritualization of the material reality. This world becomes the dwelling-place of God, and since God resides in this world, man must not renounce it, rather efforts be made to transform it into *sach khand* or the Kingdom of God on earth. This presence of Divine in this manifest world implies that this world is also true like its creator (*ap sati kia sabhu sati/tis prabh te sagali utpati*), though it is not everlasting like Him. Since God is believed to be present in the created phenomena, the idea of searching for Him in forests and mountains is futile: it is like going away from God. This forms the basis of the Sikh stress on householder's life *vis-à-vis* asceticism. Rejecting the idea of life-negation and world-negation, the scripture advises man to aspire and strive for his spiritual ideal while living a normal life marked with familial and social obligations. Instead of renouncing the world, man must have total commitment to God and should ever remember Him as the sole power in each being and behind each action. He should ever feel and realize His presence in each being and at every place. This would mean spiritual enlightenment or inward illumination having its natural corollary in a certain specified social behaviour marked by the values of love, equality, justice, altruism, service, etc.

VIII

In this manifest world which is relatively true, man is both the central figure and the supreme creation among the numberless creations of God. His status is the highest because he is the only conscious being with the potential to develop his consciousness to such a level as to realize his true self and achieve mystical oneness with the Divine. Like other creation, man is also, in essence, divine: there are references in the Sikh scripture to the effect that human body is made of five perishable material elements but God has put in it a sixth element which is the life force of

body and which is not perishable like the other five elements which constitute the body. This everlasting sixth element, called *atman*, is also called a divine particle. Thus, human body becomes the temple of God (*dehi mahi is ka bisramu*), and the scripture advises man to keep it pure – in thought, word and deed. It is this body which is going to serve as means for the soul to realize God. This explains for the Sikh preference for the proper upkeep of body rather than put it to any hard penances.

Let this be clarified here that human soul is divine in nature, but it is not identical with Divine. The often quoted example in the Indian religious literature to connote the difference or relationship between individual soul and the supreme Soul is that of sea water and the water contained in a pitcher. The Gurus have also use the example of sea water and the waves: the latter are born of the water, but show their distinct existence for a while only to merge back into the sea water. The human soul is essentially related to the supreme Soul, gets separated from it to live brief bodily existence(s) and to finally coalesce with it. The Guru explains it by saying that God places his *joti* in human body, human being lives a short span of life in the mundane world to realize his divine potential and then this *joti* once again is reabsorbed in its original source.

However, we must hasten to add that the divine presence in the created phenomena is *qua* spirit, it is not physical. In fact, the Sikh metaphysics stresses the unity of God and He is taken as one, with no co-equal. He is self-existent and the only One not subject to *kal* or time. Thus, the idea of divine incarnation in human or in any other form is rejected. This manifest world and all that we find in this world including humans, gods, *et al.* are all creations of God who is not only the creator of everything and every being but is also immanent in the creation, thus lending them essential divinity. As creator, He is transcendent but He becomes immanent as He manifests Himself, as Spirit, in His creation. In the transcendent state, He is formless (*nirakar*) and without attributes (*nirgun*) but assumes attributes (*sagun*) as He manifests himself in different forms of His creation.

An important postulate of Sikh metaphysics as articulated in the Gurus's hymns is the belief in *avagavan* or transmigration of soul. Man is born in this world, lives a specific span of life and passes away, but human life, which one attains after passing through several lower species, is proclaimed an opportunity to

realize God (GGS, V, 176). All this happens under the divine Will like everything else taking place in the world. Sikhism does not adhere to the theory of certain gods in charge of birth and of death. It is the supreme One under whose will everything moves. Dharamraj and Jamduts, the angels of death in Hindu metaphysics and mythology, are either spoken of as destructive forces of nature or brought in while discussing the beliefs of other traditions. Similarly, Chit and Gupt, two angels in Hindu mythology responsible for recording all actions, good as well as evil, of man, have not been accepted as reality: they represent conscious and unconscious actions of man. The physical death of man and, for that matter, of other beings does not mean the total annihilation because the essence within being divine is eternal. It only implies change of one manifest form into another.

Every deed done by man, every word uttered by him and even every thought that came to his mind, may that be good or bad, conscious or unconscious, leaves behind an impress which clings to him. 'Dharamraj' is not a historical person but only symbolic of divine reckoning of man's deeds. Guru Arjan says that even Dharamraj will be able to do nothing if the paper, giving account of one's deeds, is torn by the Name Divine (GGS, V, 614). Man's present birth is influenced by the *karma* of his past lives, and the *karma* of his present life are bound to influence his future. He puts on the garb of this body according to the action of his past life. In other words, we can say that the principle of transmigration is directed by the quality of human action, and the human birth is attributed to the quality of the actions of the previous existence and the state of the soul at the time of death - *koti janam bhrami aia piare anik joni dukhu pai/sacha sahibu visaria piare bahuti milai sajai*, GGS, V, 640). Thus, the idea of transmigration is ethically-oriented, and rebirth in a particular life or shape is the result of the quality of one's actions - good actions leading to the sovereign human birth whereas bad actions leading to animal or other lower existence.

The idea of divine immanence in each human being gives birth to the Sikh doctrine of the spiritual unity and ethnic equality of mankind: all humans are spiritually united with Creator-God, and all of them are equal among themselves. This idea of equality in Sikhism is all-inclusive and makes no distinctions between man and man on any basis whatsoever. Sikhism makes no distinction

between people of different castes, creeds and classes, and between man and woman. This is unlike the Hindu view of humans having emerged from different organs of Brahma, thus there being inherent inequality amongst them. Among other Indian religions, for example, the Digambar sect of Jainism considers woman unworthy of attaining liberation: they believe that she must by her noble *karma* secure birth in male form to realize the ideal of liberation. This indispensable condition of male life for release does not hold good in Sikhism which makes no distinction between man and woman in this regard. In fact, where man's highest status among all other beings is confirmed in the scripture and wherein he is said to be at the helm of all living beings, the person addressed in the hymn is in the feminine gender.

VIII

What according to the Sikh metaphysics is the spiritual ideal of man? It is neither the acquisition of a kingdom nor the achievement of *mukti* or liberation – the former is the highest objective man can aspire for in mundane life whereas the latter is the highest spiritual ideal according to most of the world religions. Rather the ideal before the Sikh is love for God - *raj na chahahu mukti na chahahu manu priti charan kamalare* (GGS, V, 534). And, the Sikh way of life shows that there is no inherent mutual contradiction between love for the Divine *vis-à-vis* liberation. Man's union with Divine in an expression of selfless love implies a stage of consciousness when he lives a bodily existence in this world but is ever mystically one with God. Guru Arjan goes to the extent of saying that a person, who is otherwise very handsome, of high family, very intelligent and enlightened and wealthy, is dead if there is no love for God in his heart (GGS, V, 253). When such a man, a man who loves God and his created beings discards his bodily vestures, his soul coalesces with the Divine and he is free from the process of transmigration. The former stage is *jivan-mukti* and the latter *videh mukti*. In other words, the former is synonymous with love for the Divine and the latter is a natural corollary of the former. This explains the Sikh preference for the former. As for the Sikh preference for Divine love *vis-à-vis* *raj*, we must emphasize that it does not imply renunciation of the world: Sikhism rejects both extremes of asceticism and hedonism, and rather exhorts man to live an active and robust but a righteous and contented social life

The Sikh concept of God being that of an ultimate Reality which is indescribable and incomprehensible, *nirakar* and *nirgun*, how can one express one's love for the formless God and how can one become the object of His love and grace? If the former is the Sikh spiritual ideal, the answer to the latter can be found in the Sikh way of life. This also forms the basis of the Sikh ethical behaviour. Guru Arjan, in his *Sukhmani*, says that in mind one should eulogize the formless God and in society one's behaviour must be truthful - *ustati man mahi kari nirankar/kari man mere sati biuhar*. While defining *dharm*, Guru Arjan, again in the *Sukhmani*, lays equal stress on remembrance of Name Divine and performance of noble deeds - *sarab dharam mahi sresat dharamu/hari ko namu japi nirmal karamu*. The Sikh metaphysic doctrine of the non-dual dynamic Reality is the vis-a-tergo of the Sikh social thought of the spiritual unity and ethnic equality of man. There is considered no inherent inequality among mankind, whatever their apparent differences caused by regional and cultural reasons. On the other hand, all human beings are taken as essentially one with God and equal among themselves as well as in His eye. Man has to realize this spiritual unity and ethnic equality because the best way to love God or realize God is to love the mankind, the creation of God.

The idea of love, equality, etc. is just not an intra-religious issue in Sikh thought, rather it extends these values to the inter-religious and inter-community relations as well. In modern-day society of religious and cultural pluralism, man must learn to live and live peacefully with other faiths and faith-communities. The attitude of religious exclusivism is sure to cause bad blood in inter-religious relations which no one can today afford because, as says Hans Kung, there can be no peace among the nations without peace among religions. Sikhism is a pluralistic religion which acknowledges the validity and genuineness of each faith and appreciates all prophets irrespective of their spatio-cultural affiliations. It does not condemn any scripture, rather condemns those who do not reflect on them and act upon them. No doubt, it is critical of some of the arid and effete practices prevalent in some traditions. It rejects polemic, and instead recommends dialogue to sort out intra-religious or inter-religious issues. It recommends first listening to the ideas and views of the other before expressing your own. Guru Arjan's inclusion of hymns by

holy men belonging to different creeds, castes and regions is indicative of his view that revelation is neither religion-specific nor region-specific nor caste-specific nor person-specific. We need to revive the spirit, We stress the spirit, of institutions like *sarbat khalsa* and *gurmata*.

Man is in essence one with God, but in his ignorance and under the influence of *haumai*, he fails to realize this essential oneness, rather he develops an egotistical attitude of dualism: man fails to realize the Unfathomable within because of the veil of *haumai* in between, says Guru Arjan (GGS, Vol.I, 205). This causes his differentiation from God and consequently from other human beings. *Haumai* makes man degenerate – spiritually as well as morally. Spiritually, it keeps *jivatma* separated from the *paramatma*, thus keeping it in bondage leading to man's continued transmigration; socially, it causes man's differentiation from other beings leading to strife among individuals, communities and nations (GGS, Vol.I, 278). This alienation, both spiritual and social, denotes a mental state, a sort of veiling of the consciousness of man, resulting in man's duality from God as well as from other beings. Such a person is called *manmukh* or self-oriented in the scripture. Guru Nanak calls *haumai* two-pronged: it is both the malady and the remedy. It is flexible to lean to the other side as well – towards God, to feel His presence and realize His will. In this situation, the veil of darkness thins away and the malady gets transformed into remedy and blessing (GGS, Vol. I, 466). The darkness of ignorance is gone, sense of duality ceases and man can see and realize the Lord. This identification of the individual will with the divine will makes man happy and healthy in mind and person - *khudi miti tab sukh bhae mana tana bhae aroga*, says Guru Arjan (GGS, Vol.I, 260).

The pentad of evils – *kam, krodh, lobh, moh* and *ahankar* – are the corollaries of *haumai*, and there are numerous such other references in the scripture where these five are referred to in a variety of ways; at places it also makes reference to certain other evils along with these and they include *kusangat, trishna, ninda* and others. Man is advised to guard himself against these evils which 'break into the human body and plunder the nectar of Divine Name' - *panch chor mili lage nagaria ram namu dhanu hiria/ gurmatai khoj pare tab pakare dhanu sabatu rasi ubaria* (GGS, V, 1178). All actions performed under the influence of *haumai* or its correlates go against the will of God whereas it becomes man to

make continuous volitional efforts to negate the individual will's egoity vis-à-vis the Divine will and instead identify the former with the latter. This connotes a mental state when man gives credit for whatever he does to the Divine. Following the tenets of the scripture, he feels and realizes the divine presence in all places and beings and he is ever sure of the Divine working through him in all his social actions and behaviour. This identification of two wills also implies one's spiritual unity with Divine as well as with other human beings.

The Gurus recommend *nam-simran* as the only means to achieve this end. For this man will have to eradicate *haumai* because it stands in binary opposition to *nam*. Guru Arjan calls it the nectar, the *simran* or remembrance of which brings comfort and satiates all 'thirst' (GGS, V, 318). No doubt, *nam-simran* has been a key concept in the Sikh metaphysics, but it has not been explicitly defined or explained anywhere therein. We agree that like any other feeling, it is also beyond perfect definition yet different scholars have given different definitions. It is certainly not the repetition of one or the other names of God or just reciting one *bani* or the other. Of course, reading and reciting *bani* is necessary but it has to be followed by understanding of the text and then by trying to live those precepts in one's social life.

As we said earlier, God in Sikhism is both transcendent and immanent, *sagun* (with attributes) and *nirgun* (without attributes). Human mind has invented various attributes for God because the object of his love and adoration whom he has to remember and attune himself with must obviously be a personalized entity. However, this entity in Sikh metaphysics is not a deity: the idea of idol-worship or divine incarnation stands rejected in Sikhism. On this spiritual sojourn, man needs the guidance and help of Guru. The guidance and help of the Guru is essential but this does not mean taking the seeker to a higher stage of spirituality as if by miracle or on a crutch. The Guru simply guides, but the seeker has to tread the path himself. Man can do so by following the Guru's advice and not by a mere affirmation of faith in a particular Guru. In other words, Guru does not intercede with the Divine on behalf of man, but gives him the blessing of *nam-simran* which can transform the *niane* (ignorant ones) into *siane* (enlightened ones), which can help man progress inwardly and outwardly.

The last but a very crucial factor in enabling man realize the

ultimate ideal is the divine grace. Of course, Sikhism does not view divine grace in isolation from human love for God which is best expressed through deeds of love and altruism for mankind in general. Implicitly, human endeavours become complementary to divine grace for the attainment of spiritual objective, thus distinguishing it from the Christian concept which treats it as all-inclusive and self-sufficient. In Sikhism, the pre-requisite is no doubt divine grace because it blesses man with the perception that enables him to understand the Word and thus discern God within and around himself. Guru Arjan says that enlightenment comes only with the grace of God (*prabh kirpa te hoi pragasu*), and all other garbs, intellectual exercises and meditations and penances fail to make man unite with God (*anik bhekhu aru gian dhian man hathi miliau na koi/kahu nanak kirpa bhai bhagatu giani soi*). The Divine grace reveals the way, Guru guides him on the way, but it is the man who himself has to tread that path, who has to participate in social activity – sharing his perception with others and in the process cleansing the society of all evils and building a social structure which is conducive to let this perception flourish.

In fact, it is this human quest, human endeavour which leads to the spiritual ideal revealed to man by the divine initiative. This has been beautifully explained by Guru Nanak in his *Japu(ji)* with the help of Panj Khands wherein the seeker's quest ends with his arrival in Sach Khand, the last and the apex of the integrated multi-dimensional progress where he realizes oneness with God as also with entire mankind.

Chapter VI

MARTYRDOM

I

The Sikh history is replete with examples of martyrdom, that of Guru Arjan Dev being the first one. The tradition of martyrdom in India begins with Sikhism as there has been no known instance of martyrdom prior to that. Thus, Guru Arjan Dev becomes the first martyr not only in Sikh tradition but also in the history of India as a whole. Interestingly, none of the Indian languages has a word to connote the meaning of the word martyr or martyrdom. In fact, Sikhism not only marks the beginning of the concept and tradition of martyrdom but it will also be no exaggeration to say that the Sikh community in the short span of its history has undergone as much of suffering and made as many of sacrifices and courted martyrdoms as no other faith-community in the world has. The community remembers, in their daily *ardas* or supplicatory prayer, these sufferings, sacrifices and martyrdoms so as to seek inspiration and strength from them for realizing the mission of the Gurus. Following the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, many more instances of martyrdom in the Sikh tradition took place primarily because the Sikh stand for freedom of faith and human dignity came in clash with the policy of religious intolerance and fanaticism followed by the government of the day.

The term martyr or martyrdom has roots in the Greek word *martur*, also written as *martus* and *marturos*, which stands for witness. There was, it seems, no equivalent of the word martyr or martyrdom in any of the Indian languages until Sikh tradition adopted the word *shahadat*, borrowing it from Arabic language and Islamic tradition. The word *shahadat* in Arabic also means testimony or affirmation. Thus, the term martyrdom or *shahadat* implies the high tragedy of supreme sacrifice one makes for one's faith and thus bears witness to its truth and to one's own passionate adherence to it. Implicitly, a martyr or *shahid* is one who by courting martyrdom bears witness to the truth of his faith and to

his own unswerving commitment and allegiance to it. Implicit in martyrdom is one's willingness to withstand aggression or persecution, and meet death or short of that, suffer privation for upholding that commitment and/or any other righteous and nobles cause. A Sikh theologian defines martyrdom as "a phenomenon the root cause of which is the challenge to the Establishment-religious or secular-either from without or within. The challenger may be a revealer (Prophet) of a new, unorthodox truth, or a discoverer of a new scientific idea..."

Martyrdom, however, is not a concept peculiar to any one religious tradition, though martyrdom in Sikhism has certain characteristics different from the one in other traditions. It is not like the crucifixion of Jesus Christ who is also said to have preached a divine message based on an ethic of love, peace and mercy so that the Kingdom of God is established on this earth. However, his crucifixion during the time of Pontius Pilate has been taken as an act of atonement for the sins of human beings so that they become purified and eligible to enter the Kingdom. And, it was for those who followed the way of Jesus. There are also instances of religious and spiritual persons laying down their lives to help or protect their followers or co-religionists. Sectarian considerations seemed to dominate all such acts of sacrifice. However, in the Sikh case, as we shall see in the following pages, the spiritual preceptors and others underwent suffering and privation and even faced death so as to provide an example to mankind in general to have the moral strength to stand up for their conviction, for the truth of their conviction: any injustice and oppression must be resisted and one must have the freedom of conscience.

In the Indian context, during and following the Aryan invasions, both the invader and the invaded might have fought against each other, believing strongly in the truth of their struggle/fight and showing their deep commitment to the cause of that truth. However, there is available no specific Indian word in pre- and post-Aryan era to refer to one who fought and died for such a cause, for certain values. The pre-Vedic and non-Vedic indigenous faiths, Jainism and Buddhism, also suffered persecution and death at certain places at the hands of Aryan Hindus: the latter believed in the truth of the revelatory Vedas and the natives, including the *sramanic* traditions of Jainism and Buddhism, might have been committed to whatever their faith. Many followers of the

indigenous religions might have suffered privation and even death for their commitment to a faith they believed in, but there was, as it appears today, no term and no word to denote this. On the other hand, there has been in India a tradition of self-inflicted suffering which generally aims at purifying one's own inner self but sometimes also used for awakening the conscience of the oppressor tyrant. There have been numerous instances of self-mortification or self-destruction by many holy men for the purpose of checking the tyrant from committing oppression and evil. In fact, the concept of *satyagrah* used as a political weapon by Mahatma Gandhi during the twentieth century has also its roots in this background. However, this kind of sacrifice cannot be called martyrdom or *shahadat* in the true sense of the term: it contains some elements of martyrdom, but lacks the major element of suffering persecution and getting killed at the hands of the tyrant.

The ancient Indian history is also replete with examples of many a struggle taking place between Good and Evil. However, martyrdom is essentially free from the contrasting and oppositional conflict between Good and Evil, gods and demons, believers and non-believers. The presence of the human element, suffering and supreme sacrifice by the human were, of course, the central motif in the struggle. But we also find that in each such struggle it is, on the one hand, an oppositional conflict between the Good (godly) and the Evil (demonic) and the intervention by Divine must invariably take place on behalf of the Good, thus minimizing the significance of human suffering and sacrifice and giving credit for everything to the Divine. A potential martyr should not only be fearless of death and persecution but also free from all feelings of prejudice and ill-will against anybody, especially the persecutor. In all cases of theomacy in Indian mythology, we find feelings of enmity and prejudice on both sides. Second, if people suffer at hands of fanatic Kans or if Prahlad fails to have freedom of faith, the victims do suffer and struggle, but they overcome Evil only when intervention of Divine on their side takes place. The tradition of self-inflicted suffering and torture, presence of the feelings of ill-will and prejudice and the divine intervention in all the struggles fought for the sake of truth and values are the most important reasons which perhaps explain for the absence of any Indian equivalent for *shahid* or *shahadat*. Maybe that was also one of the

reasons which resulted in the political subjugation of the nation when it came face to face with some Semitic communities.

II

At the time the Sikh religion originated, there were two prominent religions-Hindusim and Islam-prevalent in India. No doubt, in the pre-Aryan India existed an organized religious life based on its own philosophy of life as shows the Rig Vedic reference to the *sramanas*. The Aryans soon dominated the prevalent Indus Valley civilization but the acculturation between the two ethnic groups gradually gave birth to a world-view dominated by the Vedic tradition: the Indus valley civilization got pushed into the background. The new world-view favoured life-negation and world-negation, and religion became devoid of any social context. The divorce from social reality reduced religion to a set of arid beliefs and lifeless rituals. The voice of truth got lost in the din of clashes of the mutually contradictory philosophical doctrines expounded by numerous sects and sub-sects that had emerged. The practice of renunciation resulted in the moral degeneration at the individual and social levels. Each felt concerned for one's own salvation and no one cared for the moral and ethical well-being of the society as a whole. The social structure was horizontally divided into four different caste groups which denied a sizeable section of society the chance to realize their spiritual potential. Sexism existed as a system of marginalization of woman. This sexist discrimination against her became all the worse when she happened to belong to the so-called lower caste or lesser privileged class in society. She completely lost her independent entity, became an object for the enjoyment of male counterpart and that is why she committed *sati* or self-immolation at the pyre of her husband.

The doctrine of life-negation and world-negation brought in its wake moral and ethical bankruptcy in socio-religious and subjugation in political life. The Muslims who came to India as traders in the south soon turned invaders in the north-west and then conquerors and rulers of India. When Babar invaded India in 1526 and caused much death and destruction, unleashing inexpressible atrocities and oppression on the natives, India was ruled by a ruling class which was least concerned for the welfare of common man. Their rule was marked by injustice and exploitation, oppression and intolerance. Interestingly, it was the

on the invitation of the governor of Punjab (Daulat Khan Lodhi) and 'Alam Khan (an uncle of the Delhi king, Ibrahim Lodhi), that Babar invaded India. Guru Nanak feels rather pained at the bloodshed and suffering caused by this invasion, but he also sees Babar as an unwitting instrument of the divine Will to punish the Lodhis for having failed to protect their subjects, for having violated the laws of God.

During the Guru-period, Akbar has been the sole exception of being a king who followed a policy of religious tolerance. He was a kind of pluralist who did not work against any faith or faith-community. However, this policy of religious tolerance and *sulh-i-kul* ended with the regime of Akbar. No doubt, some Rajput princes like Jai Singh, who founded the famous city of Jaipur, pursued this policy in their states, but the pendulum, swung towards bigotry and intolerance, coercion and oppression during almost all the following regimes in Delhi. There was as early as the Sultanate period an attempt for the complete imposition of the *shari'* at rule, and the royal chroniclers tried to give Islamic garb to any politically expedient action. In later years, destruction of places of worship and imposition of the protection tax (*jizia*) on non-Muslims and the forcible conversion into Islam were common features of the Mughal rule even though all this distorted the social structure as envisioned by their prophet. Such oppressive policies resulted in the persecution of non-Muslims, creating among the two communities a sense of distrust and disharmony, discrimination and hatred. This also resulted in reducing the native Hindus into a humiliated and submissive nation. Even though the Sufis did make attempts, feeble though, at creating an atmosphere of inter-religious tolerance and goodwill, the entry of Islam into India has on the whole been marked by an ugly recurrence of religious intolerance and persecution.

III

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, reflected deeply on the existing socio-religious and political situation in the country and also happened to be an eye-witness to Babar's invasion and the suffering caused in its wake. He protests in his hymns, collectively known as "Babar Vani", against this uncalled for death and destruction. But the truth Guru Nanak had received from God, the truth he had been sharing with mankind in general and the truth he himself lived stood for life-affirmation and world-

affirmation (as against the prevalent philosophy of life-negation and world-negation). He held the entire created phenomena, including man and the world he lived in, as real, though relatively real: God not only created everything but also permeated through the entire creation. This lent spirituality to the mundane reality, and relative reality to what was then considered mere *maya* or unreal. From the idea of divine immanence in each being was derived the doctrine of spiritual unity and ethnic equality of humankind. Since God manifested Himself qua spirit in each being, the Gurus advised man to love all, be just to all and perform deeds of philanthropy for the welfare of masses: there was no place for tyranny and oppression, injustice and violence by man against man.

Guru Nanak believed in the path of truth and love and wanted others also to follow this faith. However, when he saw the forces obstructing the path of truth and love, he raised his voice of strong protest. This has been perhaps the first ever protest of this kind in the religious history of mankind made by a spiritual preceptor. He was so strongly given to the truthful behaviour in human social relations that he proclaims Truth to be the highest, but truthful living is called still higher. In another of his hymns, the Guru wants those desirous of treading the path of love to be ever ready to sacrifice their head. Guru Nanak thus first propounded his message of love and equality and then seems to prepare his followers to become witnesses to that truth, to be ready to suffer persecution and even death for the sake of truth. Thus, we can also say the seeds of martyrdom in Sikh tradition are latent in the teachings of Guru Nanak himself.

Thus, from its very infancy Sikhism has stood for truth, for righteousness and exhorted its followers to fight against those who subvert the truth. The Sikh scripture, on the whole, articulates the general framework of structure within which the ideal of truth is to be realized. It is also normative in that it serves as the basis of the code of conduct and ethics for the followers. These latter together constitute the Sikh way of life, and one such constituent prescribed is that this world being the dwelling-place of God be transformed into Sach Khand, where the values of equality, love, justice and dignity should prevail, the devotees must neither put others to fear nor own to anybody's fear, and they must not shrink from making the supreme sacrifice in a holy cause of defending these values. The death of heroic men is holy, should

they lay down their lives for a righteous cause, says Guru Nanak. At another place in the scripture, Kabir reiterates the same idea in a little different way as he says:

*gagan damama bajio pario nisane ghao;
khet jo mandio surama ab jujhan ko dau;
sura so pahichaniai jo lare din ke het.;
purja purja kati marai kabahu no chhade khetu.*

The hero, entering the field,
Fights on without quailing.
Know that man to be a true hero
Who fights in defence of the defenceless;
Hacked limb by limb, he still flees not the field.

—GGS, Kabir 1005

Guru Arjan also proclaims that it has been the commandment of the Lord that there should be no dominance of one over the other and all should live in peace, prosperity and justice: he gives this socio-political situation the name of *halemi raj* or a polity deominated by righteousness. Guru Gobind Singh, who authored three compositions on the Chandi theme, prays to Almighty in one of the concluding verses of his *Chandi Charitra Ukti Bilas* seeking the divine boon to ever do noble deeds and be able to lay down his life for the sake of righteousness: he also exhorts his followers to be ever ready to strive for truth and even die for the sake of truth:

*deh siva baru mohi ihai subh krman to kabahun no taron,
na daro ari so jab jai laron nischai kari apuni jit karon
ar sikhaho apane hi mana ko ih lalach hau gun tau ucharo,
jab av ki audh nidan banai ati hi ran mai tab jujh maron.*

Lord, grant me this boon:
Never may I turn back from righteousness;
May I never turn back in fear when facing the foe;
May I ever instruct my mind to chant Thy praises;
And when the end arrives,
May I fall fighting on the field of battle.

To stand up to a righteous cause, to stand up in defence of the hapless and defenceless, to be willing to make even the supreme

sacrifice for the sake of a cause held dear by a fellow citizen -all this requires a lot of courage and fearlessness. The Sikh Gurus have repeatedly exhorted man to be fearless and give up cowardice.

Thus, in Sikhism, one is required to give up all cowardice, be brave and courageous enough to stand up against all kinds of injustice, oppression and high-handedness. One must be willing to suffer privation and even meet death fighting against these and such other evils, with no personal motive or interest attached to that fight. In fact, true martyrdom, in Sikhism, lies in the willingness to suffer without flinching. Sikhism prefers non-violent resistance to begin with, but if all peaceful means fail to make the oppressor see reason, the resort to sword is also justified. Guru Nanak and his successors prepared their disciples for this with a view to replacing the existing social setup with a new world order where values of equality and love, justice and tolerance, compassion and self-respect prevail. This was a revolutionary ideology for a nation given to passive submission and humiliation, a people who always waited for divine intervention to help them out as and when the situation became absolutely unbearable.

IV

History provided in Sikh tradition the first such opportunity, an opportunity for one to stand witness to, to suffer persecution and death for a righteous cause when Jahangir ascended the throne of Delhi. He succeeded Akbar (1542-1605) who was known for his liberal religious policy and the Sikh chronicles also refer to his amicable relations with the Sikh Gurus. However, Jahangir was not as liberal and tolerant, rather he was under the influence of the fanatic and exclusivistic clergy, especially the people like Shaikh Ahmad of Sirhind of the Naqashbandi order. He soon got alarmed by the growing influence of Guru Arjan as he wrote in his *Tuzk*:

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

No doubt, the rising popularity of a non-Muslim holy man was too much for Jahangir and the fanatic clergy which advised him on various matters, the Guru's meeting with Khusarau added fuel to the fire. The Emperor says that when "Khusrau stopped at his [Guru Arjan's] residence, the latter came out and had an

interview with him. Giving him some elementary spiritual precepts picked up here and there, he made a mark with saffron on his forehead which is called qashqa in the idiom of the Hindus and which they consider lucky." The Emperor now came with the decree that the Guru be arrested and brought to him. He also awarded the Guru's houses and dwellings and those of his children to Murtaza Khan, and also decreed that his possessions and goods be confiscated and he be executed according to *yasa siyasat*, literally punishment by law or capital punishment given through means which prevented spilling of blood. Implicitly, it involved punishment of extreme torture without shedding blood, and this was the punishment inflicted on Guru Arjan Dev.

The words of Jahangir quoted above mean that Jahangir watched the Sikh movement with disapproval for many years: he did not like some of his co-religionists giving up their faith in favour of Sikhism, the rising popularity of the Sikh movement, Guru Arjan being addressed as Sacha Patshah (the True Lord) and the Guru meeting the rebellious prince Khusrau and 'blessing' him which, according to the Emperor, meant taking the Prince's side in the Mughal dynastic dispute against Jahangir. He apprehended danger to his throne from the Sikh movement which many people considered as becoming 'state within the state'. However, this is not the whole truth, and there were several other reasons which prompted Jahangir to take this extreme step against the Guru.

Sikhism, the youngest of the major religions of the world today, tends to accept the plurality of faiths, acknowledges the validity of all of them, and rejects the claim of monopoly over truth by any particular religion whichever. It states quite unequivocally that revelation cannot be religion-specific, region-specific or person-specific. It stands for the freedom of man to practice the faith of his choice. This ideology of the Sikh Gurus stood in opposition to that of religious intolerance and persecution followed by Jahangir and later on by his successors, especially Aurangzib who tried to rule by the laws of *shari'at*. The clash of contradictory ideologies and the general feeling that a large number of people were being mentally prepared to refuse to accept the unjust and oppressive, intolerant and exploitative policies of the contemporary government had made the Emperor rather apprehensive.

Jahangir's feelings of intolerance of other faiths and faith-communities were incited a great deal by the fanatic clerics especially people like Shaikh Ahamad of Sirhind. He was the man strongly opposed to the liberal religious policy of Akbar, Jahangir's predecessor. He was also responsible for the death of Abu Fazl, a courtier of Akbar who wrote *Akbar-nama* and was the main force for shaping the religious policy of Akbar. Shaikh Ahmad was strongly opposed to all non-Muslim faiths and their holy men, and was thus against Guru Arjan who had by that time become a rallying point for a strong movement in favour of religious tolerance and pluralism. He prompted Muslims especially the followers of his Naqashbandi Sufi order to pursue an exclusivist policy by providing a theological basis so as to make the *kafirs* (non-Muslims) submit to Islam. He aimed at the expansion of Islam with the help of state authorities. He is said to have incited Jahangir against the Guru when he was at Sirhind in pursuit of Khusrau, who had rebelled against the Emperor and whom the Guru is alleged to have provided some sort of help. Shaikh Ahmad obviously presented to the Emperor exaggerated reports of the activities of the Guru and of the kind of help he rendered unto the Prince. When Guru Arjan was martyred, Shaikh Ahmad did not hide his glee and gave expression to his happiness at the elimination of the Guru of *the 'kafirs'*.

Thus, according to this view, Guru Arjan Dev was given capital punishment according to the law of *yasa siyasat* under the orders of Emperor Jahangir. He was, no doubt, incited by various persons and factors, but ultimately the responsibility lies on him for it was he who issued the decree to arrest and execute the Guru. However, there is another opinion as well, though many of the modern-day scholars seem to reject it. According to this view, supported strongly by a letter, written only about four months after the incident, by a Jesuit and which is still preserved. As per this letter, Chandu Shah, who was a Diwan in the Mughal administration and who had a personal grudge against the Guru, also gets involved in the matter and it is he who takes upon himself the responsibility of executing the Guru. The information provided in the letter is rejected on the ground that Father Jerome Xavier, the author of this letter, perhaps fell a prey to the rumours spread by the state to absolve itself of the responsibility by subverting the public perception of the event.

Sikhism originated, among other things, with the aim of transforming the humiliated and etherised Indian community into a self-respecting nation. It believed in the doctrine of frightening none and at the same time submitting to the fear of none. Rather it proclaimed love for mankind the only way to love the Lord. Guru Arjan, in one of his hymns, says that one must imbibe such a feeling of love in one's heart that he ever feels closeness to the Lord (GGS, V, 807). He further states that a person who does not love the Lord is a dead log even though he may be very handsome, come of high family, be very intelligent and enlightened, and affluent (GGS, V, 253). The Guru obviously did not like the overbearing and arrogant attitude of Chandu: he said or did nothing against him, but only refrained from having any family alliance with him. However, Chandu remained full of malice towards the Guru ever after the latter declined the offer of matrimonial alliance of Chandu's daughter for the Guru's son. He was instigated by Prithi Chand as well, but the malice in his own heart was the main reason which made him first prefer complaints against the Guru and then ultimately get his lawful custody, as says the letter of the Jesuit, to torture him to death. Later on when the Emperor mended relations with Guru Hargobind, he gave over Chandu in the Guru's custody : Chandu met a humiliating death at the hands of the Sikhs. This fact of history also testifies to Chandu's nefarious role in the martyrdom of the Guru.

The role of Prithi Chand and several other imperial officials like Sulahi Khan and his nephew Sulabi Khan also cannot be overlooked, though they were not directly responsible for the Guru's arrest and execution. Different chronicles give details of how Prithi Chand tried to harm the Guru on various occasions, both directly and indirectly. His refusal to accept the spiritual succession to Guru Arjan, his setting up of a separate *gaddi*, his complaints to various government authorities against the Guru on different occasions, his and his wife's conspiracies to kill child Hargobind, his manipulation with Sulahi Khan and Sulabi Khan, etc. are all part of history now. He had first invited *faujdar* Sulhi Khan with the intention of harming the Guru, but he died before he could take any action against the Guru. He then invited Sulabi Khan but God had willed otherwise and he also got killed by one of his own men before reaching the Guru. Similarly, Chandu Shah also played his role, and we have discussed this in the chapter on the Guru's life.

Clearly, the entire life of the Guru was full of many challenges, but he bore witness to the truth of his faith and to his own unswerving commitment and allegiance to it. Guru Arjan stood for the religious freedom of man and refused to renounce his faith when so desired by the ruler of the day. He refused to pay the fine unreasonably imposed on him, even though the devotee Sikhs of Lahore are said to have offered to collect the required amount through voluntary donations. He never showed, in word or deed, any grudge or ill-will against anyone conspiring against him. He willingly offered himself to suffer any privation and even meet death for upholding his principles. As a contemporary Jesuite missionary records, in a private letter referred to in the preceding pages, this 'good Pope' "died, overwhelmed by the sufferings, torments, dishonours" heaped on him. Thus, Guru Arjan became the first martyr of the Sikh faith. Let this be reiterated here that the main cause of the martyrdom of the Guru was obviously the intolerant religious policy of Emperor Jahangir, but the role of Chandu and others was equally reprehensible and cannot be overlooked.

Bhai Gurdas, who was not only related by blood to the Guru but had also worked with Guru Arjan as his amanuensis when he compiled the Sikh scripture, has composed *vars* and *kabitts* which interpret Sikh doctrines as well as detail several contemporary events and persons. In one of his *vars* he has gone to the extent of listing names of important Sikhs of the first six of the Sikh Gurus, but unfortunately, he gives no details of circumstances leading to the martyrdom of the Guru. Only one stanza (No. 23) of one of his *vars* (XXIV) deals with the incident which has invariably been acknowledged as a watershed in the development of Sikh history and tradition. This stanza also concentrates describing the last moments of the Guru's life as conforming to those of a hero referred to in the Sikh scripture. He does not talk about either the circumstances leading to the event or to the exact nature of tortures and consequent death. The silence of Bhai Gurdas in this respect could only be explained by saying that perhaps by referring to the spirited message of the Guru he wanted to take the Sikhs out of their traumatized state.

Anyway, it was the hot month of May when the Guru was arrested and imprisoned in the Lahore Fort. He was, some sources say, chained to a post in an open place exposed to the sun from morn till evening. He was made to sit, stand and lie on hot sand

and boiling water was thrown on his naked body. Tradition believes that he was also made to sit on a red hot iron plate and hot sand was poured over his body. This caused blisters all over his body. The Guru bore all these tortures and humiliations as the will of God and even declined the offer of Mian Mir to intercede on his behalf. Whatever He ordains appears sweet, and I supplicate for the gift of Name, Guru Arjan is said to have uttered at that moment. He had proclaimed in his hymns to accept whatever He wills and one must be sacrifice unto His will- *jo tudhu bhavai so parvanu/ tere bhane no karbanu* (GGS, V, 676). This also testifies to the strong Sikh opposition to miracles, especially a spiritual preceptor's performance of a miracle to obstruct or violate the divine will. Obviously, at this moment of time the Guru suffered from heat apoplexy. He desired to bathe in the Ravi, a request which was acceded to. It is also said that the tormentors themselves took the Guru to the river. Either way, the Guru was escorted to the river and the cold and soothing water of the river put an end to the tortures and sufferings being inflicted on the Guru.

V

The martyrdom left a deep impact not only on the history of the Sikh faith but also on the history of India. He had provided during his lifetime scriptural, doctrinal and organizational base for a revolutionary movement. He and his preceding Gurus had preached truth and exhorted their followers to stand witness to the truth. They had made efforts to undo the base of the prevalent unjust and intolerant, oppressive and exploitative social structure and instead build a new social setup wherein prevailed the values of equality and love, justice and dignity, tolerance and harmony. His martyrdom was a living example to be followed by those who loved truth, who were committed to the values of truth and righteousness. His son and successor, Guru Hargobind, began the doctrine of *miri-piri* by donning two swords at the time of his succession. So far the Sikh movement had been peaceful largely because the ruling class was tolerant of other faiths and faith-communities. Now Guru Hargobind had to take up sword against the exclusivistic and oppressive policies of the government of the day.

The impact of Guru Arjan's martyrdom can also be seen in the events which led to the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675), the ninth Guru of the Sikh faith. He assumed the

spiritual leadership of the Sikh faith in 1664 when India was ruled by Emperor Aurangzib. A pious man in his personal life, Aurangzib was an orthodox Muslim who had waded through a river of blood to reach the throne: he had to imprison his father and kill his brothers to get the crown. He followed a fanatical religious policy to appease and please the orthodox Muslim clergy. He decreed “to destroy with a willing hand the schools and temples of the Infidels and put an entire stop to their religious practices and teachings” (1669) and imposed *jizya*, a tax non-Muslim population had to pay for permission to live in an Islamic State (1679). There were many more such edicts which aimed at humiliating and harrasing the non-Muslims. Though Aurangzib had nothing personal against Guru Tegh Bahadur, yet both of them stood clearly for ideals in stark opposition to each other. Guru Tegh Bahadur could not bear the persecution of others and he seems to have made up his mind to resist the Emperor’s policy of religious persecution and even to lay down his life to redeem the freedom of belief.

The decisive moment came in 1675 when some Kashmiri *pandits* waited upon the Guru at Anandpur. They had come to him to complain against Iftikhar Khan, Aurangzeb’s satrap in Kahsmir, who was making *en masse* conversions to Islam through use of force. The Guru listened to their woes and resolved to take upon himself the onus of defending their right to religious practice and belief. Resolved to challenge the royal policy of religious exclusivism and intolerance, the Guru of his own set out for Delhi. Although the Guru was himself leading to Delhi, the authorities arrested him on the way, put him in chains and brought him to Delhi. His refusal to renounce his faith resulted in his public execution in Chandni Chowk on 11 November 1675. However, before beheading him, three of his devoted followers were also tortured to death before his eyes.

The resolution by the Guru to court martyrdom was deliberate and conscious, and he took this decision of his own. The authorities intervened only after he took up the challenge to undo both the evil as evil and the suffering of evil as such: the authorities felt his teachings were strengthening among people the resolve, the determination to suffer hardship and even death rather than give up their faith under coercion. The foundation for this was laid by the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, and now the situation was getting ripe for erecting the superstructure of the Khalsa. It was a peculiar

situation of self-prompted and meaningful suffering for the sake of others but to uphold a cherished ideal. The religious history of mankind provides no second example of a spiritual leader laying down his life for the people belonging to a religious tradition other than his own. In the Indian history and folklore, he has always been remembered as the protector of the Hindu faith - a unique example of its kind in the history of mankind. However, the roots of this unique occurrence are found in the martyrdom of Guru Arjan.

Interestingly, there are several Sikh scriptural hymns criticizing the Hindu religious symbols of *janeu* and *tilak* which the Brahmanical class had begun to consider as an end in themselves, thus giving precedence to form over the spirit of religion. The Gurus criticized those who wore such outward symbols but imbibed not the virtues these symbols stood for. However, since a faith-community wanted to wear these as symbols of their faith, the Guru felt that it was their right to do so since he stood for freedom of belief and practice for everyone. On the other hand, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and for that matter any other of the Sikh Gurus, had nothing against Islam as such, and the Sikh scripture unequivocally states that the scriptures of neither the Indian nor Semitic religions can be called false, rather false are those who do not reflect on them. The Sikh advice to a Muslim has throughout been to become a good, true Muslim and for a Hindu to become a good, true Hindu. Had the contemporary political situation in India been the other way round, Guru Tegh Bahadur would surely have made the same sacrifice for the sake of religious freedom of the Muslims.

The Guru throughout remained in perfect poise and committed to his resolve, and his spiritual state reflecting full faith in God's will can well be imagined from a close reading of the *slokas* he is believed to have composed during the days of his captivity in Delhi. The followers who had accompanied the Guru to Delhi retained their unflinching faith in the Guru and his ideals till they were put to cruel death before the Guru's own eyes. This was like a true martyr who must meet his end in perfect poise, neither waivering nor grudging. Interestingly, even the New Testament (John 12) while referring to Jesus' mental state on the eve of his crucifixion says that his heart felt "troubled" and Jesus himself called that period "an hour of suffering."

Thus, Guru Tegh Bahadur and his disciples who courted death

along with him became the next martyrs of the Sikh faith. No doubt, the sacrifice made by Guru Tegh Bahadur is without any parallels in human history. Guru Gobind Singh, his son and spiritual successor, in his autobiographical *Bachitra Natak* (V: 14-16), also testifies to it as he refers to the martyrdom of the Guru as an act unparalleled in history:

Their *tilak* and *janju* the Lord saved;
Great deed the Guru performed in the Kaliyuga;

... ..
For *dharma*'s sake he performed this deed;
He gave away his head, but not his resolve;

... ..
Breaking the potsherd of body at Delhi king's head,
Left he for the Realm Celestial;
None else performed the kind of deed
As did Guru Tegh Bahadur.

The tradition of martyrdom in Sikhism, which was begun by Guru Arjan, will not be complete without making a reference to the sacrifices made by Guru Gobind Singh and especially the martyrdom courted by his young sons. Guru Gobind Singh sacrificed his entire family (including father, mother and sons), his own life and in fact everything that belonged to him. In his fight against the oppressive and unjust policies of the Mughal government and the fanatical attitude of the hill chiefs the Guru sacrificed many of his Sikhs whom he held as dear as his own sons. Still he had no complaints and expressed complete contentment in the will of God. For example, when the Guru was passing through the Machhiwara area after leaving Chamkaur, one day he lay on the bare ground all alone and sang a hymn - *mitra piare nu hal murida da kahina* - expressing his satisfaction and contentment in the will of God.

All the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh also courted martyrdom even before they were majors: the elder two, Sahibzada Ajit Singh and Sahibzada Jujhar Singh, were aged 18 years and 14 years, respectively, when they laid down their lives at Chamkaur fighting against the Mughal forces supported by the hill chiefs who had pursued the Guru violating the vows they had taken to the contrary. The fight obviously was imposed on the Guru who did not fight for a territory but for man's religious freedom and human dignity. These young boys were being trained from their

childhood days to stand against injustice and oppression and even be ready to sacrifice their lives whenever need be. It was also as part of this training that two years earlier, Sahibzada Ajit Singh was deputed, on 7 March 1703, when he was barely 16 years of age, to take out a party of about 100 horsemen against the Pathan chieftain of Bassi, near Hoshiarpur, to rescue a young Brahman bride forcibly taken away by him.

The younger sons of the Guru, Sahibzadas Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, were bricked alive under order of the Nawab of Sirhind: the young boys, barely nine and seven years of age, were handed over to the Mughal satrap of Sirhind by an old servant of theirs who escorted them this way as they got separated from their father and other members of the family after evacuating Anandpur. These young boys remained unflinched in their faith and without any waivering of mind preferred death to giving up their faith when forced to make the choice - a lesson they had learnt from their parents, their heritage. Their passionate commitment to their faith even at such a young age and the stark contrast of the cruel death meted out to them with their tender age make their martyrdom all the more significant and unique. No other such example is found in the religious history of mankind. Their grandmother who had been escorting them gave away her life as the news of the martyrdom of the young ones reached her while still in captivity.

The tradition of martyrdom in Sikhism which began with Guru Arjan has Continued even in the post-Guru period has comprises a long list of martyrs who suffered privation and even met death but remained committed to the truth of their faith, to the values their Gurus stood for. In the period following Banda Singh Bahadur's martyrdom in 1716, the Sikhs were hounded out and prices were levied on their heads. The invading Afghans and the local Mughal government did their best to liquidate the Sikh community and their religion. Stories of the Sikh persecution have been many but not a single instance of a Sikh waivering in the commitment to his faith. That is why their sanctum sanctorum, the Harimandar at Amritsar, was demolished several times, the Sikhs quickly rebuilding it and assembling there every Diwali and Vaisakhi. The more they were tortured and oppressed, the more powerful and determined they became, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century, they had become political masters of the

land of Punjab. This had been an unparalleled story of the political power coming out of martyrdom.

The seeds of this long tradition of martyrdom, of facing privation and even death for the sake of truth were sown in the hymns of Guru Nanak, but the tradition with Guru Arjan. The latter's martyrdom has left a very deep impact on the Sikh faith and followers.

SUMMING UP

Guru Arjan Dev occupies a place of special significance not only in the history of the Sikh faith but also in the history of India as well as of Indian religions. He played a very important role in consolidating the Sikh faith and tradition by providing it its scriptural, doctrinal and organizational basis. He gave to the Sikhs their scripture, now known as the Guru Granth Sahib, which moulds and guides the entire Sikh way of life. He also gave to them their *sanctum sanctorum*, the Harmandir Sahib or what the westerners call the Golden Temple, which has ever since served as the source of inspiration to the community in their spiritual life as well as in their socio-political struggle. He prescribed an ideal, stood witness to the truth of that ideal and ultimately laid down his life to uphold the truth of that ideal. As we have seen in the preceding pages, the work of the first four Gurus was preparatory and it assumed a more definitive form in the hands so Guru Arjan Dev. Later Gurus substantiated the principles manifested in the life of Guru Arjan Dev who thus marked a central point in the evolution of the Sikh tradition.

At the time Sikhism originated, India was ruled by the Lodhi dynasty, the king being Ibrahim Lodhi who, like most other rulers of the Sultanate who preceded him, was deeply committed to the Islamic *shari'at* laws and was rather severe in his treatment of his non-Muslim subjects. He made a point of destroying all Hindu temples and other places of worship. Of course, a sense of expediency on the part of rulers and the compulsions of neighborly living among the common man had recently begun to dawn, but barriers between the two communities had not yet been fully relaxed. Guru Nanak was an eye-witness, at Eminabad, to the death and destruction caused in the wake of Babar's invasion. These hymns, unlike any other work in the entire Indian literary corpus of the period, are highly critical of the corrupt and tyrannical rule typified by the Lodhis who failed to protect their protégé. In spite of all the suffering and death caused by the invasions of Babar, Guru Nanak sees him as an unwitting instrument of the

divine will to punish the Lodhis for having violated the laws of God.

Referring to the contemporary rulers, Guru Nanak in his hymns calls them cruel man-eaters". He refers to the contemporary situation as full of greed, sin and falsehood, and where welfare of the common man was nobody's concern. Guru Nanak also found the courts of justice in the contemporary society full of favoritism and corruption. Talking about the judicial system in his contemporary society, he says elsewhere that "The qazi fouls his justice by corruption." The ruling class led a life marked by voluptuous ease and irresponsibility, falsehood and hypocrisy, intolerance and oppression. Emperor Muhammad Jalal ud-Din Akbar who was a contemporary of Guru Arjan earned a name for himself for the revenue reforms and his liberal religious policy. He put to an end various laws discriminatory against the non-Muslims and curbed the power of Muslim theocracy. However, the government attitude towards the Gurus and the Sikhs underwent a drastic change with the passing away of Akbar, and pendulum swung toward bigotry and intolerance, coercion and oppression immediately after him. That was the last phase of Guru Arjan's life.

Guru Arjan was born and lived in the socio-religious milieu discussed above, but before taking up the life of the Guru, we have tried to explain the concept and meaning of Guru in the Sikh tradition. The concept of Guru is central to the Sikh thought and way of life. Sikhism believes in the ten person Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh: all the ten Gurus are believed to be one in spirit though different in body. No one else however pious and enlightened can claim to be or accepted as the Guru. Thereafter, the Guru Granth Sahib or more precisely the Word as contained in the Guru Granth Sahib is the Guru Eternal for them. They reverence it like a living Guru, but do not worship it as an idol on the altar. It is like a constitution which governs and shapes the overall Sikh way of life and the Sikhs always approach it to seek guidance from it in every sphere of life.

Sikhism believes that the hymns of the Gurus as found incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib constitute the revelation. There are several hymns in the scripture itself which testify to the fact that the Gurus uttered only the Word as received from God- *jaisi mai avai khasam ki bani taisara kari gian ve lalo*

(O Lalo, I proclaim the Lord's Word as it comes to me), says Guru Nanak. Guru Arjan also calls it *dhur ki bani* or the Word received from the Highest. Thus, in this sense, God Himself becomes the primal Guru of the whole creation, and this Guru chooses certain persons to act as His instruments. This is how Guru Nanak, in his *Sidh Gosti*, refers to God as his Guru. "God has placed Himself within the Guru, Which He explicitly explains." Says the scripture (466). Sine God's chosen ones remain ever in tune with the supreme Being, the scripture accepts God as residing within the Guru. Thus, the words God and Guru are used interchangeably in the Sikh tradition. Also, the words God (the source of revelation), Word (*bani* or revelation) and Guru (the medium through which revelation is communicated to mankind) are also used as synonyms at places.

Guru Arjan Dev was an illustrious poet whose poetic output is more than that of any other Guru: his contribution to the Guru Granth Sahib is the most of anyone else. He has composed hymns in a number of poetic meters which shows his deep understanding and mastery of poetics. Although most of his compositions are in Punjabi with a mixture of Sadh Bhakha, but some of his works clearly prove his mastery of Sanskrit, Hindi and Persian languages apart from the Lehndi and other dialects of Punjabi. He was equally proficient in music and his understanding of musicology could be assessed from the fact that he composed hymns in thirty different *ragas* or musical measures. He not only assigned the compositions of the Gurus and other contributors to the relevant *ragas* but also added the relevant *gharu* to each of the *ragas* used in the scripture. Guru Arjan was not only a prolific poet but also a meticulous editor with an eye for exactness and thoroughness. The manner in which he has numbered the hymns, while compiling the scripture, in each poetic form and meter as well as of each of the contributors and added these numbers from one step to other has proved infallible over the years: no interpolation in the scripture has been possible without disturbing the entire numbering scheme. This has helped in maintaining the authenticity of the sacred text.

Guru Arjan was an original thinker and practical philosopher. His hymns reiterate the non-dual dynamic nature of reality which is not only the creator of this manifest material world but is also immanent in it. His immanence in diverse manifest forms does not, however, affect his unity. Since he has created all the beings,

He loves them all, having enmity towards and fear of none. He is the creator of all, but He himself is self-created (*saibham*); He is never born in any form and is not subject to birth and death. The ultimate object of human life has been to realize the essential oneness with the Creator-Lord, but man in his ignorance and *haumai* begins to consider himself independent of God. This results in his separation from God and isolation from fellow human beings, thus causing him spiritual anguish and material suffering. Guru plays a very vital role in guiding man on the path to spirituality, but he does not take man to a position of higher spirituality as if by miracle or on a crutch: he simply guides and shows seekers the path but the seeker has to tread the path himself.

The idea of the immanence of God leads to the spiritualization of the social and socialization of the spiritual. In other words, the same God pervades all beings and all places. This implies the mundane world we live in is not *maya* or unreal, rather it is the abode of God. Since each being has the same divine spark within, all humans are equal and it becomes everybody to imbibe feelings of love and compassion for other. This implies that causing injury to one's own body by way of penance or austerity as well to the others is like injuring God Himself. Since this mundane world is also the abode of God, renouncing it in favour of forests and mountains in search of God is in fact like running away of God. Sikhism calls human body the temple of God and this world the dwelling place of God. It also advises man to endeavor for the welfare of humans as well as of society at large. Unlike the prevalent Indian belief, it does not ask man to depend on the intervention of any god/goddess or incarnation to help him overcome evil: man has to struggle and strive himself. The struggles faced and sacrifices made by Guru Arjan Dev and other Gurus are an example of putting that precept into practice.

The life of Guru Arjan Dev was full of challenges. Born the son of Guru Ram Das and maternal grandson of Guru Amar Das, the fourth and third spiritual preceptors, respectively, of the Sikh faith. Guru Arjan ungrudgingly faced the numerous conspiracies and complaints from his own elder brother, Prithi Chand. Guru Arjan's contribution towards giving a strong organizational base to the Sikh faith has also been very significant. The institution of *masands* worked so smoothly and efficiently under his supervision that it made the imperial government apprehensive of the Sikh

movement. The government became apprehensive of this coming into being a 'state within a state'. The practice of tithe was also followed regularly and meticulously. It has also been said about its regularity that one may skip or delay the payment of tax to the government, but the devotees never delayed the *daswandh* or tithe which they sent to the Guru, through the *masands*, for philanthropic ventures undertaken by the Guru. The Guru dug wells and *baolis* in various villages and towns for the benefit of the people. All this made the Guru very popular among the common masses and a large number of people embraced the Sikh faith during his pontificate.

Guru Arjan was the first martyr of the faith. Throughout his life he ungrudgingly faced many conspiracies and complaints of his elder brother, Prithi Chand, Chandu Shah who was an official with the governor of Punjab under the imperial Mughal government, and several others. He never spoke or acted ill towards any of them. However, his unswerving commitment to the values of truth and tolerance placed him in opposition to emperor Jahangir who supported the policy of religious intolerance and hatred toward those who were not his co-religionists. The Guru held strongly to the view that everybody should have the freedom of conscience, freedom to practice the faith of his choice. His hymns as well as his compilation of the scripture are ample evidence of his pluralistic tendencies which Jahangir could not accept and tolerate. The rising popularity of the movement was also not liked and approved by the powers that be. No doubt, he had begun maintaining a small band of armed followers but he harmed none and led a peaceful life. But the very fact that the Sikh movement was rising in popularity and that the dumb and etherized Indian people were regaining, because of the Guru's teachings, the moral strength to stand up to the truth of their ideal and even getting ready to suffer privation or death for it was a soar point in the Emperor's intolerant eye who decided to either convert or eliminate him. Chandu's role in the entire episode cannot just be overlooked even if he played only a contributory role.

In sum, Guru Arajan Dev (1563-1606), the fifth spiritual preceptor of the Sikh faith who played a pivotal role in the growth and development of the Sikh faith, gave to the Sikhs their holy Book, now called the Guru Granth Sahib, and their central place of worship, the Harimandar (popularly called Darbar Sahib but

known as the Golden Temple among the people of the west). He composed the highest number of hymns among all other contributors to the Holy Volumnne, compiled the holy volume and installed it in the newly constructed Harimandar at Amritsar. He built the Harmandar, the modern-day Golden Temple, in the midst of the *amritsar* tank after having its foundation laid by the famous Sufi saint, Mian Mir. He courted martyrdom, the first ever such instance in the history of Indian religions, for the sake of human dignity, for the freedom of conscience, for the freedom to practice the faith of one's choice.