

# GURU NANAK AND HIS TIMES

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## PREFACE

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This book is an expanded version of Sitaram Kohli Lectures delivered by me at Punjabi University, Patiala, in March 1970, under the auspices of the Department of Punjab Historical Studies. To the authorities of that University, particularly to its Vice-Chancellor, Sardar Kirpal Singh Narang, I am grateful for their kindness in inviting me to deliver those lectures and in taking up the publication of my book.

More than half a century ago Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, a great educationist whose vision was rivalled only by his wisdom, introduced Sikh history as a subject for special study in post-graduate classes of Calcutta University. For teaching, as also for carrying on researches in what was then a new subject in the academic field, he selected Indubhusan Banerjee, a young scholar with a brilliant degree. For about forty years Banerjee kept himself engaged in this assignment, taught two generations of students, inspired a band of scholars, and wrote a book (*Evolution of the Khalsa*) to which every student of Sikh history must acknowledge his heavy debt. He initiated me in the study of this subject, gave me opportunities of teaching it, and stimulated my ideas in different ways.

Guru Nanak's life and teachings raise many historical and philosophical problems and offer a wide scope for conflicting interpretations. I shall consider myself amply rewarded if the points of view put forward in the following pages contribute to fresh analysis.

A. C. BANERJEE

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*To the memory of  
Sir Asutosh Mookerjee  
and  
Professor Indubhusan Banerjee  
who introduced Sikh studies in Bengal*

## CHAPTER I

### POLITICAL BACKGROUND

---

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) lived in an age of political disintegration. Nothing could be more vivid than his own comment :

This age is like a drawn Sword, the Kings are butchers;  
Goodness hath taken wings and flown.<sup>1</sup>

He is said to have made his observation at Mount Sumer when the Sidhs whom he met there inquired whence he had come and in what state he had left Hindustan.<sup>2</sup>

The *Sultanat* of Delhi lost its all-India character during the weak reign of Firuz Shah Tughluq and became, in fact, a provincial kingdom. The image of political unity appeared to be irretrievably lost. His worthless successors were incapable even of maintaining the truncated heritage which he had left. In the closing years of the fourteenth century there were two rival Sultans, Nasir-ud-din Mahmud in Delhi and Nusrat Shah at Firuzabad. Among the supporters of the latter were the Amirs of the Neighbouring areas in the Punjab (Panipat, Sonapat, Rohtak and Jhajjar) but they were much more interested in furthering their own interests than in serving those of their nominal overlord. Sultan Mahmud controlled only the two forts in the capital, old Delhi and Siri. Says Yahya Sirhindi in *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi* : "The amirs and maliks of the great provinces of the empire had become kings and spent their income as they liked."<sup>3</sup> Firishta recalls the scene of decay in the following words :

The government fell into anarchy; civil war raged everywhere; and a scene was exhibited, unheard of before, of two kings in arms against each other residing in the same capital...The warfare...continued as if it were one battle between the two cities, wherein thousands were sometimes killed in a day, and the casualties occasioned by the slain were supplied by fresh

reinforcements from different parts. Some of the governors of the provinces took little share in these civil dissensions, hoping to take advantages of them, by becoming independent in the end.<sup>4</sup>

This politically disastrous contest continued for three years and served—quite naturally—as a prelude to foreign invasion. Timur crossed the Indus on 21 September 1398. His immediate purpose was to afford relief to his grandson, Pir Muhammad, who had already marched into India, captured Uchch and Dipalpur, and besieged Multan. But the great conqueror had other exploits in view. According to his own statement he had two long-term objects. A war with the infidels, he thought, would give him 'some claim to reward in the life to come.' But his purpose was not entirely selfish : he sought to provide an opportunity for 'the army of Islam' to 'gain something by plundering the wealth and valuables of the infidels'.<sup>5</sup> It was evident that the impact of his invasion would be felt primarily by the 'infidels' who were unable to protect themselves and whom their nominal rulers were unable to protect.

The geographical location of the Punjab made this province the gateway to India in ages when the sea was not used as a highway to this sub-continent. Moreover, the rich city of Delhi, the invader's primary target, lay at the south-east corner of the Punjab. Naturally it became the principal scene of Timur's policy of devastation. From his camp on the Indus he turned towards the Jhelum, and marching for a few days by the side of that river crossed it below its confluence with the Chenab at the beginning of October. Reaching the city of Talmi—not far from Multan—he received an offer from the local Hindu and Muslim notables of a large ransom which was accepted. This, however, did not prevent him from issuing his 'world-compelling order' to plunder, burn, kill and enslave. So loyally was the order carried out that "no one escaped from the holocaust except the religious scholars and the Sayyids."<sup>6</sup>

Proceeding along the Bias he crushed the resistance of Jsrath Khokar. After crossing the Bias he sent his main camp to Dipalpur (where the people had in the meanwhile massacred Pir Muhammad's garrison) and personally proceeded to Samana. The people of

Dipalpur as also of Ajudhan (Pakpattan) fled at the approach of the invading armies and took refuge at Bhatnir, a Rajput stronghold which was considered impregnable. Timur arrived at Bhatnir on 7 November. What followed is best described in his own words :

...in the course of one hour the heads of 10,000 infidels were cut off. The sword of Islam was washed in the blood of the infidels, and all the goods and effects, the treasure and the grain which for many a long year had been stored in the fort, became the spoil of my soldiers. They set fire to the houses and reduced them to ashes, and they razed the buildings and the fort to the ground.

From Bhatnir to Delhi the Jats were the worst victims of the terror. At Sirsuti, Timur's next important halt after Bhatnir, another fearful scene was enacted; apart from massacre there was conversion of several thousand Hindu women and children. The panic spread in all directions; feeling insecure in the small towns the people of Fathabad, Kaithal, Samana and Panipat fled to Delhi, hoping that the capital would afford them safety.

Passing through Samana in the third week of November, Timur marched to Delhi at the head of a force 92,000 strong. He crossed the Jumna on 11 December 1398 and entered the Jahan Panah palace. At Loni near Delhi the capture of the fort was followed by Timur's order that "the Musulman prisoners should be separated and saved, but the infidels should all be despatched to hell with the proselytizing sword". Sultan Mahmud Tughluq to Delhi, who had not opposed the invader's advance to his capital, now offered feeble resistance through his minister Mallu Iqbal Khan (12 December, 1398). After inevitable defeat Mallu retreated, leaving the Sultan's unfortunate subjects to the invader's fury.

There were about 100,000 Hindu prisoners in Timur's camp.<sup>7</sup> They had unwisely expressed delight at the prospect of being rescued by Mallu's forces. The punishment was terrible. The conqueror proudly says that he proclaimed :

...throughout the camp that every man who had infidel prisoners was to put them to death, and whoever neglected to do so should himself be executed and his property given to the informer. When this order became known to the *ghazis* of Islam,



they drew their swords and put their prisoners to death. 100,000 infidels, impious idolators, were on that day slain. Maulana Nasir-ud-din Umar, a counsellor and man of learning, who, in all his life, had never killed a sparrow, now, in execution of my order, slew with his sword fifteen idolatrous Hindus, who were his captives.

Defeated once again in a pitched battle outside Delhi, Sultan Mahmud fled with Mallu, and the conqueror entered the capital city (18 December, 1398). As mentioned above, a large number of Hindus had come into the city 'from all the country round' under the wrong impression that the capital would be a safer place than the undefended countryside. When they found themselves in danger inside the city (Timur had sent a force to seize them) "many of them drew their swords, and offered resistance." Timur's soldiers, "no longer under control, went off to the city and thought of nothing but killing, plundering, and making prisoners." To quote Timur's words again :

.....each man secured from fifty to a hundred prisoners, men, women, and children. There was no man who took less than twenty. The other booty was immense in rubies, diamonds, garnets, pearls, and other gems; jewels of gold and silver; *ashrafis*, *tankas* of gold and silver of the celebrated Alai coinage; vessels of gold and silver; and brocades and silks of great value. Gold and silver ornaments of the Hindu women were obtained in such quantities as to exceed all account. Excepting the quarter of the *sayyids*, the *ulama*, and the other Musulmans, the whole city was sacked.

The carnage went on for four days (27-30 December 1398). In the official historian's view Timur was not to be blamed 'for the events which have been recorded' : ".....though royal forgiveness had been extended to these doomed people, and the *Khutba* recited in Timur's august name was a guarantee of peace and protection, still.....the Divine order was to the contrary....."<sup>8</sup>

The sack of Delhi was followed by Timur's march to the north. Leaving Delhi on 31 December, 1398 he proceeded towards the Siwalik Hills. On his way he raided Meerut and Hardwar and devastated the countryside both on the right and on the left. Then he turned to the west, captured and plundered Nagarkot and Jammu,

and crossed the Indus on his homeward journey (19 March, 1399), leaving behind him a trail of blood, fire and pestilence.

The political consequences of Timur's invasion are well known. He conferred on Khizr Khan the government of Delhi; subsequently—on the eve of his departure—he conferred on him the government of Multan and Dipalpur as well. But the invader's writ had to be enforced by the beneficiary by force of arms. For a time Delhi fell into the hands of Nusrat Shah who was, however, expelled by Mallu. At Mallu's invitation Sultan Mahmud Shah, a refugee in Gujarat and then in Malwa, returned to the capital (1401), but the powerful minister remained its *de facto* ruler. Khizr Khan's political activities were at first confined to Multan and Dipalpur while Mallu retained his hold over Delhi and the Doab region. Mallu eventually lost his life in an engagement with Khizr Khan who gradually established his own authority in the eastern districts of the Punjab, such as Samana, Sirhind, Sunam and Hissar. But Delhi remained beyond his grasp. There Mahmud Shah ruled with nominal authority over the Doab, Rohtak and Sambhal. Hissar and Rohtak changed hands. On Mahmud Shah's death in 1412 the House of Tughluq as also Turkish rule in Delhi came to an end. Daulat Khan Lodi, an Afghan noble, who had been playing Mallu's role after his death, was selected by the nobles of Delhi as Mahmud Shah's successor; but Khizr Khan defeated him, kept him a prisoner at Hissar, and made himself ruler of Delhi (1414-1421).

After Timur's invasion the *Sultanat* of Delhi became a very pale shadow of its former self. Not only did it shrink in size and become a petty kingdom around Delhi; the Tughluq ruler did not enjoy even the ceremonial respect which was accorded to the later Mughals. Mahmud Shah had unpleasant experience in Gujarat, although he received better hospitality in Malwa. Deprived of a centre of political gravity, India became a conglomeration of provincial kingdoms which were frequently engaged in discord and strife. For nearly a century and a half there was no lofty political ideal before the regional rulers who presided over the destiny of the country; there was no political impetus to economic and cultural progress except at provincial levels. After the brief interlude of

Sher Shah's attempt at building up an Afghan empire Akbar took up the interrupted thread of political unity; through conquest and administrative consolidation he gave India a strong and stable political structure which could foster civilization on a magnificent scale.

The Punjab, exposed directly to Timur's depredations, and lying on the route of his bloodstained progress, suffered much more from his ruthlessness than those areas on the east and the north of Delhi through which he passed. The province was unfortunate in another respect; after the disintegration of the *Sultanat* it did not come under the rule of any powerful provincial dynasty which could give it some political integration, cultural orientation and economic stability. Gujarat, Malwa, Jaunpur, Bengal, the Bahmani kingdom in the Deccan, Sind and Kashmir developed a provincial personality under more or less stable local dynasties, but the Punjab remained outside this stream of political development. The Lodis had their roots in the Punjab and played the role of a local dynasty to some extent, but they could not forget the bigger pretensions associated with their mastery over Delhi. Indeed, the imperial glow of Delhi cast its fading shadow over the Lodi regime, and the Punjab, which was geographically as also politically very close to it, was dragged into political and military vicissitudes unrelated to regional interest.

The establishment of Khizr Khan's rule meant partial restoration of normalcy in Delhi and the neighbouring regions. It also meant the theoretical conversion of the Delhi *Sultanat* to a province of Timur's empire. He acknowledged his allegiance to Timur's son, Shah Rukh, and sent him gifts and tribute throughout his reign. He did not adopt the title of *Shah* and was content to be addressed as *Rayat-i-Ala*. For three years the *Khutba* was recited only in Shah Rukh's name; afterwards Khizr Khan's name was added with the overlord's permission. He did not consider himself strong enough to issue coins in his own name; he circulated coins issued by his predecessors after altering their dates. It was a system analogous to the practice of the East India Company which struck its rupees 'in the name of Shah Alam and other defunct monarchs of Delhi whose money had of old obtained good repute in the local Bazars'.<sup>9</sup> Although Khizr Khan ruled in practice as an independent potentate,

his kingdom was a truncated survival—truncated in size as also in majesty—of the decadent kingdom of the later Tughluqs.

In some parts of the Punjab, particularly in Sirhind, Khizr Khan faced serious challenge from Turkish elements who were not reconciled to transfer of political power to the new dynasty claiming to be Sayyids of Arabian origin. Their leader, Tughan Rais, expelled from the plains, found shelter in the hills and became an ally of the Khokars who formed a powerful and turbulent element in politics of the Punjab.

Khizr Khan's son and successor, Mubarak Shah (1421-1434), did not find it impolitic to adopt the title of *Shah*, to have the *Khutba* read in his own name, and to issue coins bearing the title *Naib-i-Amir Al-Muminin*. These efforts to rehabilitate the legal position of the truncated *Sultanat* did not produce much practical effect. The Punjab was exposed to serious threats from the Khokars, the hostile Turkish elements or the Turk-bachas, and the Mughals.

The Khokars had their stronghold in the valleys of the Jhelum and the Chenab, particularly in the districts of Jhang, Shahpur and Jhelum, and to some extent in the districts of Lahore and Sialkot. They had powerful allies in Sultan Zainul-Abidin of Kashmir and the Turk-bacha leader Tughan Rais. Under the able leadership of Jsrath (who had opposed Timur, had been carried a prisoner to Samarqand, and had succeeded in escaping from captivity) they raided Jalandhar, Sirhind, Lahore, Dipalpur and Kalanaur. Mubarak Shah's resistance compelled them again and again to retreat to the hills. They were not able to consolidate their hold on the plains, but the nature and extent of their depredations would be clear from the statement of a contemporary historian that in 1421 Mubarak Shah, on entering Lahore, found the city in ruins, 'in which no living thing except the owl of ill omen had its abode'.<sup>10</sup> Jsrath had contact with Shaikh Ali, the Mughal deputy governor of Kabul, and lent his aid to the Mughal invasion which took place in 1428. Shaikh Ali is described by Yahya Sirhindi as an 'accursed, heartless wretch' who 'did not show any consideration for the Musulmans and did not even fear Divine wrath'.<sup>11</sup> Later, in the reign of Muhammad Shah, Jsrath made terms with Buhlul Lodi who was then governor of Sirhind.

Jasrath's career was cut short; he was murdered by his queen in 1442. The Khokar chief might have been 'an impudent rustic', as the historian calls him,<sup>12</sup> but he was probably not without far-reaching political ambition. It is said that he had 'visions about Delhi'. He failed to realise his visions, if he really had any, but he succeeded in keeping anarchy alive in large parts of the Punjab. The flames of lawlessness burning since the bloody days of Timur were not allowed to be extinguished.

It was not Jasrath alone who provided fuel for the fire raging in the Punjab. Paulad Turk-bacha was the leader of a prolonged and serious insurrection. The centre of this depredations was Tabarhindah, which is generally identified with Bhatinda. Far more serious from the long-term point of view were the Mughal incursions into the Punjab during the later part of Mubarak Shah's reign. Jalandhar, Firozpur, Lahore and Multan suffered from the fury of Shaikh Ali's forces. It was a foretaste of what Sayyidpur was destined to suffer later at the time of Babur's invasion.

Mubarak Shah left a distracted kingdom to his nephew Muhammad Shah (1434-1445), an imbecile ruler who was unable to resist the occupation of the major part of the Punjab by Buhlul Lodi, the powerful chief of Sirhind. Multan became an independent kingdom. During the reign of his successor Ala-ud-din Alam Shah (1445-1451) the formal transfer of sovereignty to Buhlul Lodi took place.

During the five decades following Timur's arrival in India, the Punjab had neither peace nor effective government; it was continuously a prey to foreign invasions and internal anarchy. Delhi was too near and yet too far off; its weakness invited trouble in the Punjab but it was not capable of providing adequate relief for the harassed province. Lawlessness became a deep-rooted tradition. Economy lost its balance; neither the cultivator nor the trader could carry on his normal work with a feeling of security. Some disintegration of social life, as also of moral and spiritual values, is inevitable in times of political trouble and administrative chaos. There was too much of fighting, but not that kind of fighting for worthy causes which strengthens the mind and ennobles the heart. The

common people, virtually deserted by their weak rulers, unorganized, and untrained to defend themselves, succumbed to death and dishonour in a spirit of utter helplessness.

Although there was an appreciable improvement in the situation during the reigns of Buhlul Lodi (1451-89) and Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517), the bitter experience of fifty years could hardly have been forgotten by the people in Guru Nanak's early years. In the ravaged towns and villages of the Punjab some survivors of Timur's terror, and many survivors of the Khokar, Mughal and Turk-bacha depredations, were probably alive at the time of the Guru's birth (1469); there were certainly many who had heard about the atrocities from their elders and probably seen ugly traces of devastation around them. Society's capacity for healing is not unlimited; even when external wounds are healed internal sores continue to cause pain.

In this connection it is interesting to recall Babur's unfavourable impression about Hindustan. Apart from the 'masses of gold and silver' and the 'unnumbered and endless workers of every kind' he found India to be 'a country of few charms'. He wrote :

Its people have no good looks; of social intercourse, paying and receiving visits, there is none; of genius and capacity none; in handicraft and work there is no form or symmetry, method or quality; there are no good horses, no good dogs, no grapes, musk-melons or first rate fruits, no ice or cold water, no good bread or cooked food in the bazars, no hot baths, no colleges, no candles, torches or candle-sticks.

In other words, the conqueror did not recognise in India a Country in an advanced state of material and intellectual progress. "It may be" says K. M. Ashraf, "that the visitation of Timur before him in 1398 had so much devastated the land that a century and a quarter of comparatively unstable and weak central administration did not succeed in rehabilitating the fabric of social life." If peace had prevailed immediately after Timur's departure and effective government had been restored, society would have been able to recover its balance and vitality in a few years' time. But for half a century the harassed province was not given real respite for

recuperation; the haunting memory of the days of Timur and the near anarchy of the Sayyid period caused continuous bleeding and left lasting scars.

The Lodi regime lacked the military strength, administrative consolidation and political wisdom which were needed to initiate a new era of peace, stability and progress in the Punjab. There was political disorder even in Buhlul Lodi's reign. He had to deal with the rebellion of Tatar Khan Yusuf Khail, the governor of the Punjab, at a time when he was pre-occupied with the affairs of the eastern part of his kingdom. Tatar Khan was incharge of Sirhind, Hissar-Firuzah, Samana, Lahore and Dipalpur and had considerable military strength. Another rebellious governor was Darya Khan Lodi of Sambhal.

Much more significant than isolated rebellions was the looseness of the political system created by Buhlul Lodi. Instead of seeking to revive the Turkish Monarchy on the basis of the traditions established by Balban and Ala-ud-din Khalji he placed himself at the head of what was virtually a confederacy of Afghan nobles and contented himself with the position of *primus inter pares* in relation to his over-mighty Afghan subjects. The Sultan was no longer the isolated and exalted lord, surrounded by Persian ceremonials, that he had been in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. He was now a chief who was tolerated, not a master who was obeyed. He had been elevated to the *musnud* primarily to preside over a racial, *i.e.*, Afghan, monopoly of political power. There was a denigration of Monarchy which affected the character of the State, particularly in the Punjab where the rule of the Afghan oligarchy was the dominant political fact. Nominally a vice-royalty of Delhi, the Punjab during the Lodi period became 'the preserve of several powerful Afghan families.' As a Muslim historian<sup>13</sup> tells us : "One half of the whole country was assigned in *jagir* to the Farmulis and the other half to the other Afghan tribes." This peculiar concept of government was based on old Afghan traditions. As Akhund Darweza says :

The Afghans had since ancient times never considered it proper to have a king as their pride and arrogance would not let them

bow and prostrate before one of their kith and kin. Further, if they agreed to call one a king, they feared that they would thereby reduce themselves to the level of servants. They would rather like all of them to be treated as equals and it was, therefore, that all Afghans were addressed as maliks.<sup>14</sup>

Adherence to this time-honoured system was also enjoined by the circumstances which had brought Buhlul Lodi to the throne of Delhi. The Lodis had established themselves in settlements around Lamghan and Multan in the late tenth century. Islam Khan Lodi was the governor of Sirhind under the weak Sayyids. He made himself so strong as a local ruler that he was able before his death to nominate his nephew and son-in-law, Buhlul, as his successor. With Sirhind as the nucleus of his growing power Buhlul brought under his control the entire area from Dipalpur and Lahore to Panipat. His accession to the throne of Delhi had the support of the powerful Afghan nobles of the Punjab. Babur tells us that Tatar Khan Yusuf Khail, who later on staged a rebellion, was 'one of six or seven sardars who, sallying out and becoming dominant in Hindustan, made Buhlul Padshah'.<sup>15</sup>

Political and Military necessity compelled the new Afghan Sultan to depend upon tribal support. His nobles advised him to extend an invitation to the tribal chieftains of the Roh country<sup>16</sup> to come to the assistance of their fellow Afghans in India. A direct appeal was considered necessary because Multan, which had so long been the chief centre of recruitment of Afghans from Roh, had become independent. The author of *Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi*<sup>17</sup> tells us that the letter of invitation ran as follows :

God in His goodness had granted the administration of Delhi to the Afghans, but the other kings of Hind wish to expel them from the country. The honour of our women is concerned; the lands of Hind are broad and rich and can afford maintenance to many. Come, then, to this country; the name indeed of sovereignty shall remain with me, but whatever countries we may conquer shall be shared between us as brothers.....

The response was tremendous. To quote the chronicler :

On receipt of the *firman*s the Afghans of Roh came, as is their wont, like ants and locusts, to enter the king's service.



This influx of 'ants and locusts' continued during the reigns of the first two Lodi Kings. The adventurous immigrants took full advantage of a system of government in which the king was satisfied with 'the name of sovereignty' and the substance of power was left to over-mighty tribal leaders. The system of assignment, familiar since the days of Firuz Shah Tughluq, now took a special form in which the assignee was bound to render loyalty and personal service and also to maintain, out of the assigned income, a body of troops available for the king's needs. Thus emerged a weak army of tribal levies which later collapsed before Babur's well organised troops at Panipat.

Under the Lodis assignments became fewer in number, but individually larger and more lucrative, than in the second half of the fourteenth century. Holders of large assignments were expected to maintain smaller men on the same terms; a complicated system analogous to sub-infeudation grew up. They sometimes claimed to treat the assignments as heritable. In practice they exercised the full powers of executive administration; they could in fact rule as if they were kings themselves. Moreland considers it "probable that the great bulk of the kingdom was administered through assignees rather than salaried officials."<sup>18</sup>

The system of assignment, roughly resembling the system of military tenure in medieval Europe, was the basis of Bahlul Lodi's political authority. With the Afghan nobles he shared not only political power but also social pre-eminence; he treated them as his equals, addressed each one of them as *masnad-i a'li*, and even shared his carpet and food with them. This was the price he paid for keeping himself on the throne. "It was no time", we are told, "to reform or discipline the uncouth Afghans".<sup>19</sup> When the throne appeared to be secure Sikandar Lodi took some steps to turn the tide in favour of the Monarchy.<sup>20</sup> He took his seat on a throne, not on a carpet which could be shared by others. Elaborate rules were laid down for the reception of *farmans* which represented the Sultan's authority. Holders of assignments were required to submit regular accounts to the *Diwan-i-Wizarat*. But the Afghan nobility had consolidated its position and it was difficult to extort from them

substantial concessions to place the Monarchy in its old position. Ibrahim Lodi proceeded far less cautiously than his father and provoked resentment which contributed to his fall. To quote Firishta :<sup>21</sup>

Contrary to the custom of his father and grand-father, he made no distinction among his officers, whether of his own tribe or otherwise, and said publicly, that kings should have no relatives nor clansmen, but that all should be considered as subjects and servants of the State; and the Afghan chiefs, who had hitherto been allowed to sit in the presence, were constrained to stand in front of the throne, with their hands crossed before them.

It was a tactless challenge to solidly entrenched political privilege and tribal sentiment. Ibrahim Lodi was seeking a pale imitation of Balban's exaltation of the Monarchy, but he did not possess political wisdom and military resources which were needed for success.

The Punjab of the Lodis was a moth-eaten territory. As pointed out above, the administration was in the hands of king-like nobles who could deal with the common people just as they pleased. An assignee, says Moreland,<sup>22</sup> "had not to apply to a governor or other official to coerce his recalcitrant debtors, but coerced them himself, with forces raised at his own cost; and in cases where he judged it desirable, he finally abolished their claims by what, in the circumstances of the time, was probably the only effective method, killing the claimants and reducing their families to slavery." It was a crude system of local tyranny. Having no permanent title to the assignment the assignee was reluctant to invest capital for improvement of land; his primary interest lay in squeezing as much as he could from the peasantry by fraud and force.

Some verses of Guru Nanak<sup>23</sup> offer us a glimpse into the actual sufferings of the common people.

Compassion is not exercised by merely  
 beholding a suitor,  
 There is no one who receiveth or giveth  
 not bribes.  
 The King dispenseth justice when his  
 palm is filled.

Again :

Greed and sin are ruler and village accountant;  
falsehood is master of the mint.  
Lust, his minister, summoneth and examineth men,  
and sitteth in judgement on them.  
The subjects are blind and without divine  
knowledge, and satisfy the judge's greed with bribes.

And again :

The Qazi sitteth to administer justice;  
He turneth over his beads and invoceth God,  
But he takes bribes and doeth injustice.  
If any one call him to account,  
he will read and cite texts.

The Guru's condemnation of the Lodi regime reached the peak of bitterness in connection with its failure to defend itself against Babur.<sup>24</sup>

A Kingdom that was a jewel  
Was wasted by the dogs,  
No one will mourn their passing.

This corrupt system has been praised by some Muslim chroniclers, particularly in connection with their account of the reign of Sikandar Lodi. The author of the *Tarikh-i-Daudi*<sup>25</sup> tells us that "his equity beheld the weak and the strong with the same eye, and he was constantly employed in balancing evidence, deciding suits..... and trying to render his subjects happy." According to Firishta,<sup>26</sup> "Sikandar never omitted to devote a certain time to hear complaints in public, and he has been frequently known to sit at business the whole day long, even after his appointed time for meals and rest". Such conventional praise carries little weight in the context of information available from other sources. In any case, Sikandar Lodi's alleged love of justice and anxiety for the welfare of his subjects were probably confined to his own co-religionists, for he has been deservedly censured as a persecutor of the Hindus. Moreover, his benevolent efforts must have been confined to the capital city and the surrounding areas; the Punjab was geographically near but administratively almost beyond the Sultan's jurisdiction. It

was not for him or his officials to administer justice in the towns and villages of the Punjab. Whatever the formal prerogative of the Sultan might be, cases of direct interference by him in the administration of justice must have been few and far between. Apart from the *de facto* rights of the holders of assignments, it was practically impossible for a Punjab peasant to run to Delhi or Agra in search of justice. Guru Nanak probably referred to corruption in the Sultan's court when he said :

The King dispenseth justice when his palm is filled.

Neither agriculture nor trade and commerce could prosper when central authority was weak and local authority oppressive and short-sighted. In Sikandar Lodi's reign food was cheap; he is said to have kept careful watch on the price level and abolished duties on corn. In Ibrahim Lodi's reign the prices of agricultural commodities was low; it is said that ten maunds of *corn*, five seers of *ghee* and ten yard of *cloth* could be had for one *Buhl- (one-fortieth of a rupiya)*. The same small amount was sufficient to convey a person and his horse as also an attendant and to feed them on the way between Delhi and Agra. Five *tankas* could maintain a whole family and its retainers for a whole month. That the peasantry had very little purchasing power is proved by the general order issued by Ibrahim Lodi for collection of revenue only in Grain, obviously because cash was not obtainable.<sup>27</sup> While serving under Daulat Khan Lodi at Sultanpur, Guru Nanak probably received his salary in kind.<sup>28</sup> There are references in the Muslim chronicles to the scarcity of gold and silver which Moreland<sup>29</sup> explains by saying that adequate supplies of precious metals were not available in North India because the sea-ports of Gujarat and Bengal had been politically cut off from Delhi. He says :

When one or other of these tracts was under the rule of Delhi, trade could move freely, and, apart from trade, the revenue could come up country in cash; when they were independent, and cut off from Delhi by lawlessness along the roads, there would be no remittance of revenue, and trade would necessarily be hampered. At this time Delhi had been cut off from the coast for a century or more, and the cumulative effect of reduced supplies of treasure must have been important.

We learn from the Portuguese writer Barbosa that in the early sixteenth century the rich sea-ports of Gujarat, the west coast and Bengal handled an extensive trade—inland, coastal and overseas—in a variety of merchandise. These two provinces, because of their shipping facilities, collected the surplus of finished products from inland centres of production in different parts of the country and exported it abroad. There is, however, no evidence to show that the Punjab shared this prosperity. Overseas trade with western Asia and eastern Africa in the west, and with south-east Asia and China in the east, was the monopoly of merchants at the coastal ports. Information about north-west Asia's trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia is not available. It may be presumed that the Mongol invasions, followed by the visitation of Timur and the chronic lawlessness of the first half of the fifteenth century, seriously affected commercial activity through the land frontiers. There is, on the whole, hardly any doubt that the disintegration of the *Sultanat* of Delhi had adversely affected the economic development of the Punjab. There is no positive evidence that conditions really improved, and the interrupted commercial links were effectively re-established, during the Lodi regime or in the early years of Mughal rule. There are occasional—but crucial—references to economic depression and the hardship of the people. Towards the end of the year 1540, during Humayun's journey through the Punjab, there was a famine. Badauni tells us that one *ashrafi* was offered for a *seer* of millet, but even then it was not obtainable in sufficient quantity. Soon afterwards, Gulbadan tells us, at Bhakkar soldiers killed and ate their horses and camels.

The Afghan Monarchy lacked both inner strength and external majesty, factors which were essential for stability and expansion. Erskine rightly describes it as "a congeries of nearly independent principalities, *jagirs* and provinces, each ruled by a hereditary chief or by a zamindar or delegate from Delhi".<sup>30</sup> The inhabitants, he adds, "looked more to their immediate governors who had absolute power in the province and in whose hands consequently lay their happiness and misery than to a distant and little known sovereign". Moreland<sup>31</sup> says that "the monarchy of the Lodis was not a divine

inheritance but a human compromise." It survived for 75 years, but the lapse of time did not cement the discordant elements into coherence and unity, nor did it generate emotional loyalty among the people. Babur's invasions provided the external blow which was needed to accelerate the collapse of the inherently weak Lodi regime.

These invasions were a continuation of a historical process. Having finally occupied Samarqand Babur, the enterprising ruler of Kabul, felt that further expansion of territory must be sought in the east rather than in the west. The Punjab he could claim as his ancestral dominion in view of Timur's conquest. He wrote in his autobiography :<sup>32</sup>

As it was always in my heart to possess Hindustan, and as these several countries.....had once been held by the Turks, I pictured them as my own, and was resolved to get them into my hands, whether peacefully or by force.

The weakness of the Lodi kingdom was not unknown to him. Peaceful occupation was really out of the question, but the time seemed to be favourable for application of force. His own military position had been strengthened by the appointment of a Turkish artillery expert, Ustad Ali, as his Master of Ordnance. He was joined afterwards by another Turkish artillery expert named Mustafa.

The story of Babur's invasions is somewhat confusing so far as chronology and geography are concerned, but the general outline is clear. In 1518 he began seriously to look eastward towards the road to Hindustan. He subdued fortresses in the tribal area and extended his political influence among the Afghan tribes. Next year he stormed the fortress of Bajaur. There was a general massacre : "On the walls, in houses, streets and alleys, the dead lay in what numbers !"<sup>33</sup> This was not purposeless violence; the would-be conqueror wished to make a demonstration of strength and ruthlessness so that the Afghan tribes who lay across his path might know what they could expect in case of opposition.

After these exploratory adventures, as Babur himself says, he was "always actively concerned in the affairs of Hindustan."

I went there in person at the head of an army, five times in the

course of seven or eight years. The fifth time, by the munificence and liberality of God, there fell beneath my blows an enemy as formidable as Sultan Ibrahim, and I gained the vast empire of Hind.<sup>34</sup>

The occupation of Bhera and Khushab on 'the borderland of Hindustan' took place in 1519. There was no resistance. Babur considered it politic to treat the hillmen well. He issued orders to "do no hurt or harm to the flocks and herds of these people nor even to their cotton ends and broken needles". When it was reported that the Mughal soldiers were laying hands on the people, "persons were sent who caused some of those senseless people to meet their death doom, of others slit the noses and so led them round the camp."<sup>35</sup>

On this occasion Babur took steps to formally communicate his territorial claim to the Court of Delhi. As the "possession of this country by a Turk has come down from of old", he sent an envoy to the court of Delhi to ask for its surrender.<sup>36</sup> But this message never reached Ibrahim Lodi, for Babur's envoy was detained in Lahore by Daulat Khan Lodi who played a crucial role in the history of the Punjab during these critical years. He was the son of Tatar Khan Yusuf Khail, governor, of the Punjab, whose rebellion towards the end of Bahlul Lodi's reign has been referred to above. Apparently the father's crime did not ruin the son's career. He was Guru Nanak's employer at Sultanpur. Sikandar Lodi made him governor of Lahore, probably at the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>37</sup> The *Dabistan* calls him "one of high officials of Ibrahim Khan, Emperor of Delhi".<sup>38</sup> It was obvious that Daulat Khan Lodi's interest was almost certain to be affected by Babur's demand for transfer of territory. Babur returned to Kabul, leaving the conquered territory in charge of an officer who was expelled as soon as the conqueror's back was turned. Towards the end of the year Babur advanced eastward for the second time, but he had to make a hasty retreat from the frontier region in order to deal with disturbances in Badakhshan.

The third expedition took place in 1520; the invader's object was to advance to the heart of the Punjab and strike a blow at Lahore. After punishing the rebels at Bhera and strengthening his

position there Babur marched north-eastward to Sialkot which readily submitted and escaped sack and plunder. The next halt was at Sayyidpur (Eminabad in the district of Gujranwala), where resistance met with terrible punishment. After the fall of Sayyidpur Babur's progress was interrupted by the news of raids on his territory by the Arghun ruler of Kandahar. It is only after the occupation of Kandahar and the Garmsir country that Babur was free to turn his attention again to Hindustan.

Meanwhile Ibrahim Lodi's policy had alienated the powerful Afghan nobility whose support was essential to the security of the Sultanat. Daulat Khan Lodi had probably reasons to apprehend that his own lordship of the Punjab was no longer safe. Summoned to Delhi, he suspected treachery; instead of meeting the Sultan personally he sent his son, Dilawar Khan Lodi, as his representative. The angry Sultan threatened that he would have Daulat Khan Lodi arrested. Dilawar was shown some horrible exhibits of dead bodies as a pointer to the fate of rebels.<sup>39</sup> This report alarmed Daulat Khan Lodi. As Ibrahim Lodi was engaged in fighting with the rebellious Amirs in the eastern provinces, there seemed to be a favourable opportunity for rebellion in the west. With a view to strengthening his own prospects of success Daulat Khan Lodi sent Dilawar to Babur at Kabul, offering fealty and seeking his aid against the Sultan of Delhi. About the same time Ibrahim Lodi's disgruntled uncle, Alam Khan Lodi, who had sought political refuge in Gujarat,<sup>40</sup> arrived at Kabul to ask for Babur's support. It was suggested that Ibrahim Lodi should be replaced in Delhi by Alam Khan Lodi. How Daulat Khan Lodi's interest was to be protected was not quite clear, for Babur wanted Lahore for himself. However, the dissensions among the Lodis gave Babur an excellent opportunity to interfere in the turbulent politics of Hindustan.

The fourth expedition took place in 1524. Babur had probably realised that without a friendly ruler in Delhi it would not be possible for him to annex the Punjab. Alam Khan Lodi was prepared to offer the Punjab as the price of his installation in Delhi. So Babur proceeded towards Lahore with the intention of supporting Alam Khan against Ibrahim Lodi. But the later had in the mean time



taken bold and temporarily successful measures. The Sultan's forces led by Bahar Khan Lodi had driven Daulat Khan Lodi from Lahore and compelled him to take refuge among the Baluchis. Babur found Bahar Khan ready to face him. The Delhi general was put to flight. Babur's troops followed the fugitive Afghans into Lahore; the city was plundered and some of its bazars were burnt. Babur then moved south to Dipalpur, which was stormed, plundered, and put to the sword. Here Daulat Khan Lodi met Babur who assigned to him Jalandhar and Sultanpur, keeping Lahore under his own control. This arrangement offended Daulat Khan Lodi who had hoped to get Lahore back and planned to utilise Babur for the purpose of consolidation his own hold on the Punjab. He sought to persuade Babur to weaken himself by dividing his forces, but his treacherous intention was betrayed to Babur by his son Dilawar. The result was Daulat Khan Lodi's temporary confinement under Babur's order. Released soon afterwards, he was placed in charge of Sultanpur. Restless and discontented, he fled to the hills. Sultanpur was given to his son, Dipalpur to Alam Khan Lodi. After completing his arrangements for maintaining his control over Lahore and Sialkot Babur left for Kabul.

This was Daulat Khan Lodi's opportunity. He came down from the hills, collected a strong force, captured his faithless son Dilawar, and seized Sultanpur. His next success was the expulsion of Alam Khan Lodi from Dipalpur. An attack on Lahore was, however, repulsed by Babur's garrison in the city. Ibrahim Lodi sent an army for the recovery of the Punjab, But Daulat Khan Lodi succeeded in dispersing it, partly through force and partly through diplomacy. Alam Khan Lodi went to Kabul and reported these happenings to Babur. It was arranged that Alam Khan Lodi would be placed on the throne of Delhi and that he would cede Lahore and the country west of it to Babur in full sovereignty. Troubles in Balkh prevented Babur from personally leading an expedition to Hindustan immediately; he sent instructions to his commanders in the Punjab to help Alam Khan Lodi. But on his return to the Punjab Alam Khan Lodi was won over by Daulat Khan Lodi. The former's agreement with Babur was thrown over; the two Lodis joined their

forces and marched on Delhi where they were routed by Ibrahim Lodi (1525).

Babur, successful in Balkh, now found himself in a new situation in respect of Hindustan. Alam Khan Lodi's treacherous conduct had made it impossible to think again of placing him on the throne of Delhi. No other acceptable candidate was available. Thus the plan to remove Ibrahim Lodi now logically involved the annexation of Delhi with all its political implications. The limited objective of annexing the Punjab to the kingdom of Kabul was replaced by a far bigger and glittering one the prize in view was the mastery of Hindustan. The last expedition was, therefore, different in character from the earlier one.

On 17 November, 1525 Babur set out 'to invade Hindustan' for the last time. A month later he crossed the Indus at the head of 12,000 men. After crossing the Bias he secured the Submission of Daulat Khan Lodi, whose army broke up at the invader's approach. This was followed by the submission of Alam Khan Lodi. It was probably about this time that Babur received proposals for co-operation from Rana Sangram Singh of Mewar. However, he proceeded towards Delhi to meet the forces of Ibrahim Lodi. At Panipat the Sultan displayed no quality of generalship but that of personal bravery; unable to win, he died as an Afghan was expected to die (20 April, 1526). The historian Niamatullah pays him a well deserved compliment : "No Sultan of India except Sultan Ibrahim has been killed on the battle-field".<sup>41</sup>

Sultan Ibrahim's heroic death marked the end of the Lodi dynasty as also of Afghan rule, which, however, was later revived temporarily by Sher Shah. It was long before Mughal rule brought peace and prosperity to the Punjab. Harassed after Panipat by the continuing hostility of the Afghans and the strong challenge of the Rajputs, Babur was not given time by providence to organise and consolidate a new administration. Within less than a decade of his premature death the infant Mughal Empire, crippled by Humayun's weakness and his brothers' selfishness, succumbed to the Afghan challenge personified by sher Shah. It was only after the second battle of Panipat (1556) that a new era really commenced in the

history of India as also of the Punjab.

After Babur's death his second son Kamran, who had exercised virtually independent authority in Kabul during the preceding five years, marched to Lahore at the head of an army and occupied the city after capturing its governor, Mir Yunas Ali. Humayun not only confirmed his possession of Lahore but added Multan to his territory. Kamran remained loyal to his generous elder brother till 1538, helping him in suppressing the rebellion of Hindal and in resisting Sher Shah till the latter's victory at Chausa. For about nine years he was the *de facto* ruler of the Punjab, and from what we know about his character it is difficult to presume that he gave the province an efficient and benevolent administration. He was autocratic in temperament, revengeful, and politically shortsighted. Abul Fazl can hardly be accused of partisanship for his statement that Kamran "went from blunder to blunder from want of warning, wisdom and the absence of sound counsellors." After Humayun's fall he could not retain his hold over the Punjab. The province became a part of Sher Shah's empire. After the death of his son and successor, Islam Shah, Humayun came back from Kabul to recover his inheritance and defeated Sikandar Sur at Sirhind. But Babur's luckless son was not destined to enjoy a second spell of imperial power. On his premature death his minor son Akbar was proclaimed as his successor in a Punjab town, Kalanaur. The new regime was confirmed by victory in the field of Panipat. Thus the Punjab was in a sense the birthplace of the Mughal Empire.

For more than a century and a half—from the disintegration of the Tughluq *Sultanat* towards the close of the fourteenth century to the consolidation of Akbar's empire in the sixties of the sixteenth century—the Punjab passed through a long period of political troubles. The intensity of suffering was, of course, not uniform throughout the period; there were intervals of comparative peace and the people could dream of better times. But it was a long, dark age of uncertainty and restlessness, leaving its ugly scars on all aspects of the people's life. We have a glimpse into the last years of this 'iron age'—into 'the topsy-turvyism of Guru Angad's epoch'—in his well known words :<sup>42</sup>

Every beggar today would be a King,  
Every blockhead sets up as a Pandit;  
The blind man would be a connoisseur of gems,  
That is the modern way of talking of things.  
The really bad man sets up as a spiritual leader;  
The liar is judged the perfect type of man;  
So it is in this iron age.....

The political convulsions of the period under review affected the fortunes of all subjects of the *Sultanat*, including the Hindus who constituted the overwhelming majority of its population. But the Hindus suffered from certain basic political, social and religious disadvantages even when the *Sultanat* had been strong and stable. Those disadvantages were inherent in their position as subjects of an Islamic State; they were *Zimmis*, a section of the people whose existence was tolerated but who could not be admitted into full membership. To use a modern expression, they were second-class citizens in their own homeland. Having regard to their numerical strength and their roots in the soil this was an extraordinary anomaly; but it was the historical consequence of their political incapacity and military impotence.

In Islamic theocracy only Muslims were entitled to full citizenship and all privileges flowing from that status. A more or less grudging recognition was given to Jews and Christians, who belonged to the category of 'People of the Book', *i.e.*, believers in the Bible which the Prophet Muhammad accepted as revealed. No such status of modified privilege was admissible in the case of Zoroastrians and Hindus whom Muslim conquerors subjugated in Persia and India. In Persia the problem was solved by wholesale conversion to Islam. In India the vast size of the country and of the population, as also the deep-rooted attachment of the people to their ancient faith even with its crude formalism and social tyranny, restricted the scope for conversion. The infidels were burdened with certain political and civil disabilities which were calculated to prevent them from growing strong and challenging the authority of their masters. They were to serve the State as producers and tax-payers and, in return, enjoy partial and capricious protection of life

and property.

Islamic law as also political necessity compelled the Sultans of Delhi to pursue policies calculated to humiliate and weaken the Hindus, to demoralise them, and to sap their vigour and vitality through the crippling sense of inferiority. Islamic law had been evolved in the context of a predominantly Muslim population; it was exceptionally harsh to apply it to so large a non-Muslim population as the Turkish conquerors found in India. But their faith demanded enforcement of that law, and good practical reasons made this demand hard to resist. In the early centuries of Muslim rule the ruling class could not forget its foreign extraction; power was regarded as a clannish monopoly—first, of the Turks and then, of the Afghans. For any Hindu participation in power was altogether unthinkable; a converted Hindu became *Wazir* of the *Sultanat* for the first time in the late fourteenth century. In this alien land, in the midst of a vast infidel population which was potentially hostile, Islam was the strongest link, not only among the members of the ruling class, but also between the ruling class on the one hand and the small Muslim population on the other. Against the tidal waves of the vast ocean of Hinduism Islam was the strongest embankment, and it could not be allowed to be weakened through generous deviations from the *Shariat* in favour of unbelievers. Orthodoxy appeared to be an indispensable weapon in the armoury of the Islamic State in a new environment.

The claims of orthodoxy were steadily and zealously upheld by the very influential—and not a little crafty—class known as the *Ulama*. Ties of self-interest formed a strong link between them and the ruling class. Kings and nobles needed their *fatwa*; they needed royal and aristocratic patronage. A Muslim writer says :

The *ulama* were always on the look out for ways and means by which they might enhance their prestige and invest themselves with a superior social status akin to the Brahminical priesthood or the Christian clergy. Because this status was denied them by the *Shariat* and the *Sunnat*, which they aimed to propagate and enforce, they resorted to circulating and popularising spurious traditions regarding their prestige and prerogatives.<sup>43</sup>

The point of view of the *ulama* was incorporated in the doctrine of *Din Panahi* which, it is said, was propounded by Nur-ud-din Mubarak Ghaznavi in the court of Ilutmish.<sup>44</sup> The Sultan's duties were enumerated under four categories. First, he should protect Islam; he should overthrow and uproot *kufir* and *kafiri*, *shirk* (settings partners to God), and the worship of idols. If total uprooting of idolatry was not possible, he should insult, disgrace, dishonour and defame and *mushrik* and idol-worshipping Hindus, who were "the worst enemies of God and the Prophet."

The symptom of the Kings being the protectors of religion is this : when they see a Hindu their eyes grow red and they wish to bury him alive; they also desire to completely uproot the Brahmins who are the leaders of *kufir* and *shirk* and owing to whom *kufir* and *shirk* are enforced..... Owing to the fear and terror of the Kings of Islam, not a single enemy of God and the Prophet can drink water that is sweet or stretch his legs on his bed and go to sleep in peace.

Secondly, "the open display of sins and shameless deeds and the publication of forbidden things should be suppressed among the Muslim people and in the cities, territories and towns of Islam through terror of power of Kingship." Thirdly, "the duty of enforcing the rules of the *Shariat* of the Prophet should be assigned to pious, God-fearing and religious men.....". Fourthly, administration and enforcement of justice should receive proper attention.

Shaikh Hamadani<sup>45</sup> laid down twenty conditions (based on Caliph Umar's agreement with Jews and Christians) on the fulfilment of which the lives and property of *Zimmis* should depend in an Islamic State. They were not (1) to build new temples for idols, (2) to rebuild old temples, (3) to prevent Muslim travellers from staying in temples, (4) to take objection to stay of Muslim guests in their houses for three days, (5) to act as spies or to give aid and comfort to them, (6) to prevent any of their own people from showing inclination towards Islam, (9) to dress like Muslims, (10) to use Muslim names, (11) to ride on horses with saddle and bridle, (12) to possess swords and arrows, (13) to wear signet rings and seals on their fingers, (14) to sell and drink intoxicating liquor openly, (15) to 'abandon the clothing which they had as a sign of their state of

ignorance so that they might be distinguished from Muslims', (16) to propagate polytheistic customs and usages among Muslims, (17) to build their homes in the neighbourhood of those of Muslims, (18) to bring their dead near the graveyards of Muslims, (19) to mourn their dead with loud voices, and (20) to buy Muslim slaves. In addition to these negative duties they had two positive duties : (7) they were to show respect to Muslims, (8) if they were gathered together in a meeting and Muslims appeared, they were to be allowed at the meeting. In conclusion it is stated that :

If *Zimmis* infringe any of these conditions, they shall not enjoy security, and it shall be lawful for Muslims to take their lives and possessions as though they were the lives and possessions of unbelievers in a state of war with the faithful.

In the reign of Ala-ud-din Khalji Qazi Mughis-ud-din, consulted by the Sultan, delivered the following opinion on the position of the Hindus :

They are called payers of tribute, and when the revenue officer demands silver from them, they should, without question and with all humility and respect, tender gold, If the tax-collector choose to spit in the mouth of a Hindu, the latter must open his mouth without hesitation.....God Himself has commanded their complete degradation in as much as the Hindus are the deadliest foes of the Prophet. The Prophet has said that they should either embrace Islam or they should be slain or enslaved, and their property should be confiscated to the State.

Echoing the doctrine 'Islam or death' Barani says that it is not lawful to accept *jizya* from Hindus as they have neither a Prophet nor a revealed Book. He regrets that the "desire for the overthrow of infidels and the abasing of idolatondrs a polytheists does not fill the hearts of Muslim Kings" and asks : "How will the truth prevail if rulers allow the infidels to keep their temples, adorn their idols, and to make merry during their festivals with beating of drums and *dhols*, singing and dancing?"<sup>46</sup>

Such uncompromising zeal for ruthless liquidation of *kufr* and *kafiri* could hardly be reflected in practice in politics and administration. Some sort of compromise had to be made with the realities of the local situation. The infidels were too many to be

'slain or enslaved'; political authority and the administrative machinery were not strong enough for the purpose. Moreover, it was not good policy to kill or reduce to starvation all 'payers of tribute', for it was their labour which maintained Kings and nobles. It is not surprising that the doctrine of *Din Panahi* was ruled out by Balban as impossible. Ala-ud-din Khalji offered presents to Qazi Mughis-uddin but told him plainly that he would do what he thought to be good for the State or suitable for the emergency without inquiring whether it was lawful or unlawful. The Sultan's position is clearly stated by Barani : "When he became King he came to the conclusion that policy and government are one thing, and the rules and decrees of law are another. Royal commands belong to the King, legal decrees rest upon the judgement of *qazis* and *muftis*". What Ala-ud-din did as a practical politician was later done by Muhammad bin Tughluq as a convert to rationalism. In spite of his orthodoxy in respect of purely religious matters (as reflected in his coins and as testified to by Firishta) Barani and Isami condemn him as irreligious because he treated the *ulama* and *mashaikhs* (or saints) like ordinary men. More than adequate atonement was made by his successor, Firuz Shah Tughluq, during whose reign they recovered their old position in the State.

So far as the Sultans were concerned, political wisdom lay in avoiding the two extremes as reflected in the policies of the two Tughluqs. A modern Muslim historian explains the policy of *via media* :

They (the Sultans) paid a lip homage to the *Shariat* and admitted their sinfulness if they were unable to enforce any of its provisions; they kept the State-controlled *mullahs* disciplined and satisfied; over the whole field of administration, concerning which the *Shariat* is silent or nearly silent, they made their laws; if the traditional customs of the people were against the *Shariat*, they allowed them to over-ride the *Shariat* under the designation of *Urf*. Thus State laws called *Zawabit* grew under the protection of monarchy. If these laws violated the *Shariat*, the principle of necessity of *Istihsan* (the public good) could be quoted in their favour. And the back of the *Shariat* was broken for the primary reason that it had provided no means for its own development.<sup>47</sup>



The emergence of *Zawabit* was a historical necessity : a new system of law was needed to meet the requirements of a situation which the *Shariat*, meant for predominantly Muslim lands, could not meet. The rigour of the *Shariat* was curbed to some extent, but the position of the Hindus was not noticeably improved. It is difficult to believe that Ala-ud-din Khalji's revenue regulations were motivated by financial and political considerations only. Barani says : "Sultan Ala-ud-din demanded from learned men rules and regulations, so that the Hindu should be ground down, and property and possessions, which are the cause of disaffection and rebellion, should not remain in his house."<sup>48</sup> Although 'disaffection and rebellion' were no less familiar to Muslims than to Hindus, Ala-ud-din's rage was directed primarily against the latter. Apparently the masterful Sultan was anxious to apply the *Shariat*—rules and regulations recommended by learned men—"So that the Hindu should be ground down." Firuz Shah Tughluq says in his *Futuh-i-Firuz Shahi*<sup>49</sup> :

The Hindus and idol-worshippers had agreed to pay the money for toleration (*Zar-i-Zimmiya*), and had consented to the poll tax (*jizya*), in return for which they and their families enjoyed security. These people now erected new idol-temples in the city and the environs in opposition to the Law of the Prophet which declares that such temples are not to be tolerated. Under Divine guidance I destroyed these edifices, and killed those leaders of infidelity who seduced others into error, and the lower orders I subjected to stripes and chastisement, until this abuse was entirely abolished.

He imposed the *jizya* upon the Brahmins who had never before been required to pay it. He says in his *Fatuh* that he 'encouraged' his "infidel subjects to embrace the religion of the Prophet" and "proclaimed that every one who repeated the creed and became a Musulman should be exempt from the *jizya*, or poll-tax." The historian Afif thanks God because "the destruction of the infidels had achieved remarkable success."

A century later we find the same intolerance in the policy adopted by Sikandar Lodi. We read in the *Tarikh-i-Daudi*<sup>50</sup> that before his accession to the throne he wished on one occasion to go to Thaneshwar for the purpose of putting to death "a crowd of Hindus

assembled in immense numbers at Kurkhet". He was dissuaded by the famous divine, Mian Abdullah of Ajudhan, whom the angry prince at first threatened to kill for the offence of 'siding with the infidels'. The divine's argument was that the custom of performing ablutions at Kurukshetra was very old and had not been interfered with by former Muslim rulers. Such pleading carried no weight with Sikandar Lodi after his accession to the throne. At several places—Mundril, Hanumantgarh, Narwar—Hindu temples were destroyed and mosques were built in their place. The same thing happened at the ancient Hindu city of Mathura; the stone images taken away from the temples were "given to the butchers to serve them as meat-weights". Moreover,

.....all Hindus in Mathura were strictly prohibited from shaving their heads and beards, and performing from ablutions.....and no Hindu, if he wished to have his head or beard shaved, could get a barber to do it.<sup>51</sup>

The tradition of Sikandar Lodi's orthodoxy survived till the days of Firishta who says that the Sultan "made a point of destroying all Hindu temples". The statement of Bhai Gurdas, in his fifth *Var*, that Hindu temples were destroyed and mosques were constructed in their place, refers probably to the reign of Sikandar Lodi.

His persecution affected not only the Hindu community in general but also individuals who remained obstinately loyal to their ancient faith. A Brahmin named Bodhan (or Lodhan or Yodhan) was put to death for the offence of declaring in the presence of some Muslims that "the religions of both the Moslems and Hindus, if acted on with sincerity, were equally acceptable to God". The matter was brought to the Sultan's notice while he was campaigning in Sambhal. He convened an assembly of *ulama* from Delhi, Sirhind and Kanauj. They issued a *fatwa* recommending that the Brahmin should either declare firm faith in Islam or suffer death. He preferred the second alternative.<sup>52</sup>

Tradition tells us that Kabir had to face ordeals before Sikandar Lodi. During the Sultan's visit to Banaras "the Musulmans, headed by Shaikh Taqi and the unbelieving Brahmans" complained that his teaching led people astray and those who paid heed to it remained

neither Hindus nor Muslims. Summoned by the Sultans, the saint refused to make the usual salutation and obeisance. He was loaded with chains and thrown into the Ganges. He was able to swim to the shore, leaving his chains behind him. He was then thrown into fire, but his "body emerged from it more handsome than before." A furious elephant was let loose on him, but it fled on seeing him. In a verse attributed to Kabir we are told that the 'infuriated Qazi' tried to kill him three times but failed. The matter, however, did not end there. Kabir was charged with "the blasphemy of calling himself God" and again brought before the Sultan. He was asked to reanimate a slaughtered cow, which he did. The Sultan then fell at his feet.<sup>53</sup> It may be noted that in the verse attributed to Kabir there is no mention at all of the Sultan; there is a reference only to the 'infuriated Qazi'. But a meeting between Kabir and Sikandar Lodi cannot be entirely ruled out even on chronological grounds. In any case, apart from the miraculous aspects of the legend, there is little doubt that it reflects the intolerance which characterised Sikandar Lodi's policy.

This cursory review of the political and religious aspects of the *Sultanat's* policy enables us to understand the position of the Hindus in Guru Nanak's age. The Punjab had come under Muslim rule as a result of Sultan Mahmud's invasions; when the Lodi regime fell at Panipat this province had five centuries' experience of continuous Muslim rule. That experience had crushed the backbone of the Hindus; it had reduced them into a frustrated and demoralised community unable to defend its elementary rights. The Brahmin Bodhan was bold enough to sacrifice himself for his faith, but it was an isolated martyrdom which did not improve the position of the community. "When Bhai Budha asked his father to drive away the invader who was destroying his fields, the latter could only shake his head and confess his inability to do so."<sup>54</sup> People had become selfish, narrow-minded, proud and cynical, as Bhai Gurdas tells us in his third *Var*. Centuries of persecution had killed those moral qualities which sustain a people in adversity and open the road to regeneration.

Deeply interested in the welfare of mankind, Guru Nanak saw

what was happening around him. He says :

There is no count of fools who will not see,  
Nor of thieves who live by fraud,  
There is no count of despots practising tyranny,  
Nor of those whose hands are soiled with blood.  
There is no count of those who sin and go free,  
Nor of liars caught in the web of falsehood,  
There is no count of the polluted who live on filth,  
Nor of the evil-tongued weighed down with calumny.<sup>55</sup>

The advent of Guru Nanak was the signal of a new awakening.<sup>56</sup> "In the Kal age passion (or fire or wrath) is the carriage, falsehood the driver in front."<sup>57</sup> The Guru assigned the role of driver to Truth : the carriage assumed a new form and proceeded along a new track. Asked by his companion why the people were suffering, the Guru replied : "It is ordained by the Creator that before coming to a fall one is deprived of his virtue."<sup>58</sup> The recovery of truth and virtue was the essential prelude to the beginning of a new era.

## CHAPTER II

# THE BHAKTI CULT AND SIKHISM

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Guru Nanak delivered a powerful and effective challenge to traditional Hinduism as he found it actually practised in his days. He was, however, not a pioneer in this respect. His role as a religious teacher should be studied in the context of what may be called the Medieval Reformation. This term may be used to connote a general religious movement covering a period of several centuries, passing through different stages, and revolving round distinct strands of ideas and practices. What gave this movement a basic unity was the cult of *bhakti* or loving adoration of God.

The origin of the cult of *bhakti* has been traced to ancient Vedic literature. The word *bhakti* does not occur in the *Rig Veda*, but there are references in it to heartfelt devotion to Varuna. In the older Upanishads stress is laid on *jnana* or knowledge for which *sraddha* or faith is regarded as an essential basis. References are made also to *bhakti* and *prasada* or grace.<sup>1</sup>

The self cannot be gained by the Veda, nor by understanding nor by much learning. He whom the Self chooses, by him the Self can be gained. The Self chooses him (his body) as His own.<sup>2</sup>

Here it is distinctly stated that salvation cannot be gained through knowledge; neither the study of the Vedas nor the development of 'understanding', nor the acquisition of 'much learning' is the prescribed path. Emphasis is laid on the doctrine of grace. It is through divine beneficence that *bhakti* leading to salvation can be evoked.

This idea finds clear expression in the *Gita*. In the chapter on *Visvarupadarsana* Lord Krishna says on resuming his human shape :

Not for the Vedas, not for mortifications, not for alms giving and not for sacrifice, may I be seen in such guise as thou

hast seen me.

But through undivided devotion (*bhakti*), Arjuna, may I be known and seen in Verity, and entered, O affrighter of the foe.<sup>3</sup>

*Bhakti* is to be attained through *prapatti* or self-surrender which Lord Krishna advocates in the following words :

Give up all religious paths, and take refuge in me alone. I shall deliver thee from all sins.<sup>4</sup>

*Bhakti* is open to all, including women and persons of the lowest birth.<sup>5</sup> Deliverance is independent of costly sacrifices and gifts to priests. Lord Narayana himself, it is said in the *Mahabharata*, is the founder of *bhakti dharma*. Vishnu is identified with the Supreme Deity under the names of Narayana, Bhagavat and Vasudeva.<sup>6</sup>

The *Vishnu Purana* recommends *samadhi* for attainment of *moksha* or liberation, but devotees of a lower order have an alternative in *bhakti*.

Those who could not pursue the higher paths to *samadhi* and the sacred trance, might make an offering of *bhakti* or lowly love, and repeat the holy Name. Then Vishnu like a cleansing fire would purify their hearts and burn out their sin.<sup>7</sup>

The cult of *bhakti* is fully developed in the *Bhagavata Purana* in which the events of the life of Krishna, God's *purna avatara* or complete incarnation, are described in detail to illustrate His love for his votaries and His delight in their devotion. By His *prasada* or grace the devotee can snap the ties of *karma* or worldly action. The Lord says :

As the fire of greatly increased flames reduces pieces of wood into ashes, so devotion unto me consumes all sorts of sins.<sup>8</sup>

Gracious, indeed, is the Lord :

Even as a cow suckles her ignorant calf and protects it from ferocious animals, so Thou deliverest persons distressed.<sup>9</sup>

The prince of devotees, Prahlada, thus defines the purpose of *bhakti* :

"I who know the result of the enjoyment of corporal things am not desirous of having longevity, prosperity and wealth, and even the pleasures and privileges of *viranchi* which contribute to the gratification of senses. Neither do I wish to possess the *siddhis* (miraculous power.....Convey me besides Thine own servants."<sup>10</sup>

The path of *bhakti* lies through *prapatti* or complete surrender to God who is absolute but personal. It leads the devotee through the thrill of joy springing from love of God. The true devotee weeps, laughs, dances and sings with joy when he thinks of God and thus acquires His grace.<sup>11</sup> The path of *bhakti* requires the guidance of a *guru* or preceptor who, says the Lord, is to be considered as 'identical with me'.<sup>12</sup> It is open to all irrespective of caste.<sup>13</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that the cult of *bhakti* was by no means a medieval contribution to religious development; it had a long and continuous history from the earliest stage of Indian thought. But in its ancient scriptural form it had two important limitations. In the first place, it was meant primarily for the *spiritual* emancipation of the individual, not for his liberation from the chains of social slavery.<sup>14</sup> The devotees were asked to 'act in consonance with their castes'.<sup>15</sup> There was thus really no question of abolishing the caste system, although persons belonging to the lower castes were permitted to seek salvation through *bhakti*. Their admission to spiritual blessing was, however, a significant relaxation of orthodoxy. Secondly, there was no elimination of traditional rituals such as worship of idols, recitation of *mantras*, and pilgrimages to shrines in spite of the over riding emphasis on devotion to God.<sup>16</sup> *Bhakti* had to be supplemented or sustained by conformity with the usual religious exercises. Strict adherence to scriptural teachings could not, therefore, bring about real transformation of Hindu society or give it a new direction and purpose.

In the Tamil country the Alvars, who flourished between the seventh and twelfth centuries, brought to the *bhakti* cult deeper passion and fervour as also wider social significance. Drawing their ideas largely from ancient scriptures and epics they tried to evolve a form of Vaishnava faith which could offer a powerful challenge to Buddhism, Jainism and Saivism. Historically they represent a phase of sectarian strife in South India. But their religious literature breathes an emotional sweetness which is far indeed from abstruse or barren religious disputes. The intensity of the devotee's love of God is compared to a wife's passion for her husband :

I shall wed, if at all, none other than the Supreme Lord.<sup>17</sup>

Love of God makes men drunk :

If men are drunk with the love of God, they ought to dance like mad men in the streets; if they cannot they are not love-smitten.<sup>18</sup>

The Alvars played a crucial role, negatively in weakening Buddhism and Jainism, and positively in putting religious life in South India in a new mould. Their hymns, compiled and arranged by Nathmuni in the tenth century, were collectively known as *Nalayira Prabandham* which came to be considered as sacred as the Vedas. Some of the Alvars came from the lower castes and one was a woman. The position which they were accorded in religious life was a novel departure from caste traditions and the exclusive dominance of men in spiritual matters.

The *bhakti* cult was given a Saiva form by the Adiyars who also belonged to the Tamil country. Their literature was arranged into eleven groups, called *Tiru-murai*, by Nambiandar-Nambi about the beginning of the eleventh century. The greatest of the Adiyars was Tirujnana-Sambandhar who came to be regarded as an incarnation of Siva. One Adiyar hymn composer thinks of Siva as the king of the *devas*. The great god is, he says,

Immanent in *Vishnu*, in *Brahma*, in flame and in wind, Yéa, in the mighty surrounding sea and in the mountains.<sup>19</sup>

Here are a few lines from one of Manikka Vasahar's songs :

I had no virtue, penance,  
 knowledge, self-control.  
 A doll to turn  
 At others' will I danced,  
 Whistled, fell. But me  
 He filled in every limb,  
 With love's mad longing, and that  
 I might climb there whence  
 is no return.  
 He shewed His beauty, made me His.  
 Ah me, when shall I go to him?<sup>20</sup>

Manikka Vasahar's songs breathed living faith and ardent devotion. The people found in them a new response to their spiritual



cravings. "South India needed a personal God, an assurance of immortality, and a call to prayer. These it found in Manikka Vasahar's compositions."<sup>21</sup>

The east coast gave South India great religious teachers who advocated pilgrimage for salvation along the path of *bhakti*. The west coast gave India the greatest pilgrim along the path of *jnana* or knowledge. Sankaracharya's primary task was two-fold : to complete the process of decadence of Buddhism which had begun during the Gupta period and to give the Brahmanical religion a consistent and logical form by overriding sectarian differences. So great was his success that he came to be regarded as an incarnation of Sankara (Siva). Apart from the mythical sages of ancient times, he remains the greatest philosopher-reformer known to Indian history.

As a reformer Sankara established a logical monistic system on exceptionally strong foundations. *Brahman* he regarded as indefinable and omnipresent; the world he dismissed as *maya* (illusion). A great metaphysician, he was not swayed by emotional fervour like the Alvars and the Adiyars. His emphasis on *jnana-marga* or the path of knowledge was quite congenial to the learned Brahmins immersed in hoary scriptural traditions, but its practical impact on Hindu society in general was not considerable. His abstruse speculations garbed in classical Sanskrit could not be expected to evoke a direct response from the common people. He made Hinduism philosophically strong and well-equipped to resist the old heterodox faiths, *viz.* Buddhism and Jainism, but he could not interpret it in terms understood by the masses.

The need for such interpretation had begun to be felt in the days of Sankara, for Islam had already thrown up a growing challenge to the guardians of Hindu society in the South. Hinduism had to make itself a living, active force to keep the common people within the fold. From the seventh century onwards Persian and Arab traders settled in large numbers at the ports on the west coast, particularly in Malabar where local rulers encouraged such settlement.<sup>22</sup> Epigraphic evidence shows that there were Arab settlements in western India in the eighth century.<sup>23</sup> The religion of the new comers made peaceful conquests in the hospitable country. The beginning

of the ninth century saw the conversion of the last of the Cheraman Perumal rulers of Malabar.<sup>24</sup> Although the story of this conversion is not free from legendary embellishments it would hardly be unsafe to assume that Islam had begun to strike roots in the west coast in the ninth century.

It is possible that Sankaracharya's stand on behalf of a metaphysically renovated Hinduism was not altogether unconnected with the challenge of Islam. That great crusader against Buddhism and Jainism could hardly have been totally indifferent to the new faith from beyond the seas which was gradually feeling its way into the sacred fold of the Vedic religion. But neither the incidents of his life<sup>25</sup> nor his numerous writings betray any direct or indirect reaction against Islam. This need not surprise us, for it is doubtful whether Islam was as yet strong enough to provoke a direct counter-attack from Hindu society which was unusually generous to alien faiths. Sankara might have hoped that the renovation of Hinduism and the elimination of Buddhism would put the old faith on a firm basis and curb the zeal and influence of the Muslim missionaries. A specific crusade against Islam was probably uncalled for at the time.

It has been suggested that the legend of Siva's incarnation in the child of a widow represented an urgently felt need of defending Hinduism against encroaching Islam.<sup>26</sup> Tara Chand<sup>27</sup> argues that Sankara defended Hinduism against Islam with weapons borrowed from the latter. He admits that "direct testimony of any kind is completely lacking to establish a connexion between him and Islam", but he has his suspicions. "If his extreme monism", he says, "his stripping of the *One* of all semblances of duality, his attempt to establish this monism on the authority of revealed scriptures, his desire to purge the cult of many abuses, had even a faint echo of the new noises that were abroad it would not be a matter for great surprise or utter incredulity".

To us it seems that Sankara, a Brahmin steeped in the tradition of the Upanishads, needed no 'faint echo' from alien sources to appreciate the significance of monism. He holds that Self and *Brahman* are absolutely one; according to him, worship consists in the realisation of the absolute unity between Self and the Object of

worship, *i.e. Brahman*. Islamic monotheism is quite foreign to this idea of identification of God with the worshipper. Again, the idea of appealing to revealed scriptures need not have been borrowed from Islam, for every Hindu regarded *Sruti* as revelation. There is no element in Sankara's philosophy which cannot be traced directly to ancient Brahmanical learning. If he stressed certain elements in preference to others, it need not be presumed that he did so under the influence of Islamic theology. His works testify to his firm loyalty to the ancient traditions as also to the spontaneous confinement of his thought within the limits of Brahmanical orthodoxy.

From the historical point of view, as pointed out above, there was one fundamental limitation of Sankara's work as a religious reformer : he did not bring Hinduism to the level of a really popular religion, understood and appreciated by the masses for whom Islam with its message of social equality might be expected to have a natural appeal. What he did was not enough for full satisfaction of the common man's spiritual and social cravings. Another transformation of the ancient faith was required for the protection of Hindu society against the growing threat of Islam. By the eleventh century Muslim traders had settled on the Coromandel coast, Muslim saints like Nathad Vali had undertaken missionary activities, and grants of land for construction of mosques had begun to be made by local Hindu rulers like Kun-Pandya. Muslim travellers visiting South India in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries refer to the increasing number and influence of the Muslims. Despite the reformatory work done by Sankara along the path of knowledge (*jnana-marga*) and by the Alvars and the Adiyars along the path of devotion (*bhakti-marga*) Islam, fortified by newly acquired political authority, was steadily extending its area of erosion into Hindu society. The latter reacted through resurgence of the *bhakti* cult.

Of this fresh self-assertion of Hindu society in the South the acknowledged leader was Ramanuja. This great Vaishnava teacher lived in the eleventh century. The development of Vaishnavism on an emotional basis as a distinct cult in South India was due to the Alvars, but its philosophical basis was provided by Ramanuja. As

Carpenter<sup>28</sup> says :

His religious philosophy was fed from many sources; it was developed along lines of thought that were undoubtedly of immense antiquity; but many of its details were sharpened by reaction against the monistic doctrine of Sankara, and owed their form to his critical antagonism.

Ramanuja rejected Sankara's doctrine of absolute monism and adopted a system of qualified monism; the individual souls were regarded as the modes of *Brahman*. He declared that salvation could be attained by *bhakti* only; but for souls in a lower stage of spiritual advancement progress to *bhakti* lay through *prapatti* (surrender). He harmonised Vedanta with the Krishna cult of the *Bhagavata Purana* by indentifying Vishnu with *Brahman*. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the cult of *bhakti* was propagated in South India by Vaishnava teachers like Nimbarka, Anandatirtha or Madhva, Vishnuswami, Vallabha, Pillai Lokacharya and Vedanta Desika. Philosophically these teachers were not in complete agreement with Ramanuja, but the emphasis on *bhakti* was the common feature of their teachings. Nimbarka identified Krishna with *Brahman* and left the South to reside at Brindaban, one of the *tirthas* specially associated with the Krishna legend.

One of the most remarkable features of this phase of the *bhakti* cult was its awareness of social problems; it paved the way for the liberalisation of Hindu society. The old privileges of the higher castes could not be completely swept away, but the lower castes received a grudging of religious status which had been denied to them for centuries. Ramanuja offered religious instruction to a group of Sudras called Satanis and attached them to his own *sampradaya* or sect. He also allowed outcastes to attend certain temples on a fixed day in the year. Nothing more could be expected from an orthodox Brahmin like Ramanuja in an age which did not contemplate liberation from traditional *varnasrama dharma*.

Some European writers<sup>29</sup> hold the view that the idea of salvation through *bhakti* was borrowed from Christianity. There are other European writers<sup>30</sup> who reject this view and trace the roots of the *bhakti* movement to internal factors. A third view, elaborated by

Tara Chand,<sup>31</sup> is that some features of the ideas of the Vaishnava teachers of South India from the ninth century onwards 'strongly point to Islamic influence'. He makes particular mention of 'the increasing emphasis on monotheism, emotional worship, self-surrender (*prapatti*) and adoration of the teacher (*guru-bhakti*) and in addition to them laxity in the rigours of the caste system, and indifference towards mere ritual'. If we accept this view we must conclude that the whole religious movement in medieval India, which we have called the Medieval Reformation, was a direct result of the impact of Islam upon Hindu civilisation.

The emphasis on monotheism began with Sankara's doctrine of absolute monism which was derived from the Upanishads. Ramanuja and his followers, who believed in qualified monism, needed no inspiration from Islam. Their writings clearly show that their eyes were directed towards the past, not to the regions beyond the seas whence merchants and missionaries were coming to seek hospitable shelter in this country. Tara Chand admits that 'monotheistic worship had been vindicated by the labours' of Sankara's predecessors, but he treads on uncertain ground when he observes : "The establishment of this monotheistical tendency received a powerful impetus from the appearance of so uncompromisingly monotheistic a religion as Islam". Sankara and Ramanuja were masters of ancient learning; they were great thinkers too. But there is no trace of Islamic theology in their interpretation of India's spiritual heritage. In giving decadent Hinduism a new and more attractive shape, they were defending it against all rivals—Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam. In the ancient scriptures and religious traditions they had a vast reservoir of ideas which they could mould anew through different techniques of interpretation. Conservative in temperament and training, they were not likely to absorb new ideas, or even to receive old wine in a new bottle, unless radical deviation from tradition became inescapable.

Emotional worship (*bhakti*) and self-surrender (*prapatti*) are peculiarly Vaishnava ideals, and we find their best and noblest literary expression in the *Bhagavata Purana*. This great work was probably composed in South India before the advent of Islam. There is no

doubt that it was widely known and enjoyed great authority. The Vaishnava ideals preached through this great work were by no means confined to South India. We find them beautifully expressed in Jaidev's *Gita Govinda*, a lyrical poem written on the eve of the appearance of the Muslims in Eastern India, and obviously uninfluenced by them. In those days ideas connected with religion had a peculiar way of crossing geographical and political barriers. "Pilgrims were for ever travelling all over India. They carried news, they spread literature, they debated, preached and sang. The fame of great teachers, the reports of new movements, were soon born afar. The mendicant ascetic needed no funds, he could beg his way."<sup>32</sup> Thus ideas travelled from the South to different parts of the country. The idea of *prapatti* was a special feature of the old spiritual heritage. We need not assume that, because the word *Islam* means surrender, the idea of surrender to God must have been a gift of the followers of the Prophet.

Laxity in the rigours of the caste system was probably a legacy from the Buddhists, although Islam may have exercised some influence on Hindu society in this respect. It should be noted, however, that Ramanuja admitted the Sudras to temples *under restrictions*, and *bhakti* was permitted only to the higher castes, not to the Sudras. The caste system has usually been more strict in South India than in the North, and it is in South India that the Muslims had the earliest opportunity of exercising their influence. But they were unable to change the social outlook of orthodox Hinduism. In some cases Islam indirectly promoted orthodoxy in Hindu society instead of strengthening liberal forces. For instance, the medieval *Smriti* works of the Bengal School, led by the celebrated scholar Reghunandan, show that the reaction of Islam on Hindu society was an increasing emphasis on the caste system and socio-religious rituals. The Hindu law-makers were afraid lest the growing intercourse between the two communities should relax the rigours of the old social system and lead to its disintegration. As defenders of that system they considered it their duty to reinforce the caste rules with new punishments and increasing intolerance. Orthodox Hinduism shut itself inside a protective shell. Instead of meeting the

external challenge by absorbing alien elements, as it had done in earlier times, it sought security in rigidity and exclusion of non-conformists.

*Guru-bhakti* or devotion to a religious teacher is an ancient feature of India's spiritual heritage. *Chaitanya-Charitamrita* of Krishnadas Kaviraj, an authoritative biography of Chaitanya as well as a standard exposition of Bengal Vaishnavism, identifies *Guru* with Krishna<sup>33</sup> on the authority of a *sloka* from the *Bhagavata Purana*.<sup>34</sup> The need for a spiritual guide was widely recognised in different religious communities in ancient and medieval times, but its institutional expression was naturally not uniform. Tara Chand draws a distinction between *Gurubhakti* in terms of ancient Indian tradition and the Sufi principle of 'devotion to a spiritual director who is human yet divine, who is a link in the hierarchical chain of preceptors (*pir, shaikh, Imam, prophet or qutb*), each successor receiving inspiration from his predecessor and being the keeper of the traditions of the sect to which the novice once admitted belongs for ever'. The distinction is somewhat overdrawn. The idea of 'a hierarchical chain of preceptors' is foreign to the Indian tradition, but the system of 'each successor receiving inspiration from his predecessors' is a conception familiar to all students of ancient Indian history. We speak of *Guru parampara*, the Charvaka school of philosophy, the Kautilya school of political thought, etc. The Vedic, Epic and Puranic literatures contain instances of succession of religious teachers and communities of disciples. Some teachers created new sects or schools of thought, while others confined their spiritual or temporal instructions to the exposition of teachings of sects or schools already in existence. The Vaishnava concept of Guruship has no Islamic background, nor does the much more developed concept of Guruship in Sikhism bear any trace of Islamic influence.

Indifference towards rituals was a logical corollary of Sankara's teaching; pursuers of *jnana-marga* need not simultaneously be pursuers of *karma-marga*. Kumarila emphasized the Mimansa teachings which attached too much importance to rituals. But Hindu society was already somewhat tired of rituals. Possibly the black

rituals of the Tantric Buddhists, in addition to the growing selfishness of priestly prescriptions, had exasperated the popular mind. The natural reaction was insistence on *bhakti*, and this presupposes the relegation of rituals to the background. But the process took time. For example, Ramanuja emphasized the importance of some curious culinary rules which were later rejected by Ramananda. According to Nabhaji, the rules of Ramanuja were 'not made for caste purposes, but for the glory of God and purity of worship'.<sup>35</sup> This seems to be the later Vaishnava interpretation of a system the rigidity of which was originally due to caste ideas.

It seems, therefore, that all those features of South Indian religious thought, which Tara Chand traces to Islamic influence, may be satisfactorily explained in the context of old traditions and with exclusive reference to the purely Hindu background. He admits this, but adds that the combination was non-Indian in origin and inspiration : ".....most of the elements in the Southern schools of devotion and philosophy, taken singly, were derived from ancient systems; but the elements in their totality and in their peculiar emphasis betray a singular approximation to Muslim faith, and therefore, make the argument for Islamic influence probable". This interpretation, it seems, derives at least partial support from the following observations of Barth<sup>36</sup> quoted by him :

The Arabs of the Khilafat had arrived on these shores in the character of travellers and had established commercial relations and intercourse with these parts long before the Afghans, Turks, or Mongols, their co-religionists, came as conquerors. Now, it is precisely in these parts that from the ninth to the twelfth century, those great religious movements took their rise which are connected with the names of Sankara, Ramanuja, Anandatirtha and Basava, out of which the majority of the historical sects came and to which Hindustan presents nothing analogous till a much later period.

Perhaps it would be permissible to detect in this argument an echo of the well-known logical fallacy called *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. The chronological sequence of developments in a particular geographical area does not as a matter of course imply a causal or necessary connection between them. It is relevant to remember



that 'the elements in their totality and in their peculiar emphasis' were not devised at a particular time by a particular individual or school of thought. We have to deal with a complicated process of evolution covering a period of several centuries and moulded by religious teachers whose opinions often differed on fundamental points. Is it not too much to assume that all the Southern reformers, from Sankara to Vedanta Desika, systematically borrowed ideas from Islam and gave ancient Hindu ideas an Islamic stamp, although, as Tara Chand admits, "the argument for borrowing cannot be substantiated by direct proof philological or otherwise"? It is far more logical to assume that Sankara, Ramanuja and their followers were neither conscious imitators nor unconscious borrowers of Islamic ideas. They felt the necessity of giving Hinduism a new orientation in response to the requirements of contemporary society. In the case of Sankara the provocative factor was Buddhism; in the case of his successors the stimulus might have been derived partially from the growing influence of the Muslim saints and the pressure of Muslim sword bearers.<sup>37</sup> But they did not consciously and deliberately put themselves at the head of a professedly defensive movement. What they sought primarily was spiritual regeneration through such adjustment of orthodox doctrines and rituals as their times seemed to call for. They turned to the *Śrutis*, the perennial source of inspiration for the devout Hindus of all ages, and canalised moderate reforms along conservative lines.

Metaphysical re-orientation of the old faith gradually receded into the background and the social aspect of religion acquired greater prominence after Ramanuja. From the social point of view *bhakti* cult assumed a definitely liberal character under Ramanada who has been described as 'the bridge between the bhakti movement of the South and the North'.<sup>38</sup> He had, however, a predecessor in Nimbarka who, though a South Indian Brahmin by birth, spent many years at Brindaban, near Mathura, associated with the legend of Krishna. For several centuries Brindaban served as an important centre for propagation of Vaishnavism in North India and Bengal.

Ramananda was by birth and training a North Indian Brahmin. He was born at Prayaga (Allahabad) and educated in scriptures

partly at Prayaga and partly at Banaras. The dates of his birth and death are controversial, but it would hardly be wrong to place his career in the last quarter of the fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth century. He belonged to the school of Ramanuja and took lessons on the *Visishtadvaita* system from Reghvananda. Nabhaji says in the *Bhaktamala* :

The immortal glory of Ramanuja's system prevailed upon earth. Devacharya (was the first) and Hariyanand the second greatly renowned (teacher), from him Raghavananda came who gave great joy to the devotees.....From him was manifested Ramananda who incarnated for the joy of the world.<sup>39</sup>

In spite of his initial affiliation with the *Sampradaya* of Ramanuja, Ramananda initiated a new movement which offered more generous recognition to the spiritual and social needs of the common people than its orthodox followers. As a reformer he was nearer to the spirit of the age than the founder of the *Visishtadvaita* system. There was no pronounced difference between them in regard to purely theological tenets, but Rama and Sita were substituted for Narayana and Lakshmi as objects of worship. This may be explained as a concession to regional sentiment : Rama and Sita were far more familiar to the people of Prayaga and Banaras than Narayana and Lakshmi who commanded greater emotional allegiance in the South. It is, however, possible to trace the worship of Rama to the *Vishnu Purana* which says :

Whether Sura or Asura (deva or demon), man or ape, let each one worship Rama, who is Hari in human form.<sup>40</sup>

We are also told :

In Rama the Supreme Being becomes manifest.<sup>41</sup>

The name of Ramanuja, says Carpenter, 'shows that Rama was at last becoming more prominent'.<sup>42</sup> It was Ramananda who made Rama the most popular deity of North India.

Despite this change in the nomenclature of the divinity to be worshipped, the emphasis on *bhakti* remained in Ramananda's system the cardinal feature of spiritual life. He avoided both *jnana-marga* and *karma-marga*. "He deemed forms of adoration superfluous, and held that the supreme reward of devotion was to be obtained by incessantly uttering God's name."<sup>43</sup> What was a

really radical departure from the system of Ramanuja was considerable relaxation of the rules of caste in religious and social spheres. Ramananda admitted to his sect disciples from all castes, even from the Muslim community, and called them 'the liberated'. He relaxed to a great extent the culinary and kindred rules observed by the orthodox Ramanuja *sampradaya*. The popularisation of religion involved another factor : the substitution of Sanskrit, the language of the learned, by the vernacular, the language of the masses. Socially as also linguistically religion descended to the level of the common people.

The simplification of worship and the liberalisation of the caste rules were Ramananda's most important contributions to the solution of the socio-religious problems of his age. It is possible that these innovations, particularly the relaxation of caste orthodoxy, were not altogether unconnected with the influence of Islam. He flourished after the establishment and consolidation of Muslim rule in North India. If he really lived up to the middle of the fifteenth century he must have found Islam entrenched in a recognised position not only in the political but also in the recognised life of the country. Its liberalism in respect of practices which the Hindus associated with caste, such as inter-dining and inter-marriage, must have appeared as a formidable threat to the orthodox Hindu community. The need began to be felt of religious reformers who would be prepared to accept the challenge of Islam and to defend Hinduism with weapons old and new, including those seized from the enemy's camp. Such an instrument of socio-religious adjustment the liberal section of the Hindus found in Ramananda. Probably he came in contact at Banaras with learned Muslims<sup>44</sup> and probed into their religious ideas. Certain it is that he found Islam in action against Hindu society seeking refuge in a shell of orthodoxy. His response to this crisis ushered in one of the most fruitful religious movements in Indian history.

But we must not exaggerate Ramananda's success. There is no evidence to show that his teaching was intended to serve as a step towards bridging the gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims. In any case, no recognisable section of the Muslim community

accepted the *bhakti* cult or the Rama-Sita creed. Nor did the Hindus accept Ramananda as a recognised religious teacher like Ramanuja. Indeed, orthodox Hinduism seems to have gradually engulfed the liberal movement initiated by him. To quote Macauliffe :

Most of the present followers of Ramananda appear to have completely fallen away from his teaching, and observe caste rules with the utmost strictness. As far as their tenets are concerned, they appear to have become hopelessly confused with the Ramanujis, and to differ only in their sectarial marks and their preference for Sita and Rama to Lakshmi and Narayana as subjects of worship.<sup>45</sup>

Ramananda propagated his ideas through oral teaching; he left nothing in writing, although religious songs supposed to have been composed by him enjoyed wide popularity among common people in North India and a hymn attributed to him is found in the *Adi Granth*. Although he left many disciples—including Kabir, according to one tradition—he did not leave behind him an integrated and enduring sect. His influence survived, but it flowed through different channels. A Hindi couplet tells us the *bhakti* was born in the South (Dravida country), brought to the North by Ramananda, and spread over the seven seas and nine continents by Kabir.<sup>46</sup>

Even before Ramananda's advent the *bhakti* cult had begun to assume a new complexion in Maharashtra through the Varakari sect which centred round the shrine of Vithoba at Pandharpur. Vithoba was regarded as a manifestation of Krishna, and the Vithoba cult reflected the principal features of the traditional *bhakti* approach to salvation through the emotional adoration of God. Three names stand pre-eminent in the history of the Pandharpur movement : Jnanesvar, Namdev and Tukaram. Their influence on religion and society in Maharashtra was deep and abiding. Ranade tells us that the Padharpur movement led to the development of the vernacular literature, modification of caste exclusiveness, sanctification of family life, elevation of the status of women, spread of humanness and toleration, partial reconciliation with Islam, subordination of rituals and learning to love and faith, and limitation of the excesses of polytheism. Namdev drew his disciples from all castes : Brahmins,

Marathas, Kunbis, Mahars, and even Muslim converts to Hinduism. Men from despised professions—tailors, gardeners, goldsmiths, potters—and from despised classes—prostitutes, slave girls—were taken into the fold. Tukaram's teachings contributed to the welding of the Marathas into a people inspired by common aims and aspiration.<sup>47</sup>

Despite its primarily regional association the message of the Pandharpur movement was carried to North India by Namdev himself. His life probably covered the last three decades of the thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth century. He saw the establishment of Muslim rule in Maharashtra. According to a Punjab tradition he lived for twenty years in Ghuman, a village in the Gurdaspur district, and was cremated there. Macauliffe mentions a well-attended shrine at Ghuman dedicated to Namdev.<sup>48</sup> There is no corroboration of this tradition in the older Marathi sources, but there is nothing improbable in it. Some Hindi works attributed to him, have survived although doubts have been expressed about their authenticity. A large number of verses attributed to him, reflecting sentiments similar to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, are found in the *Adi Granth*. His emphasis is on the unity of God who fills all creation : "There is one God of various manifestations contained in and the filling everything....."<sup>49</sup>

According to some scholars, Namdev was not a representative of the traditional *bhakti* cult but the 'first of the great Sants'.<sup>50</sup> A distinction is drawn between the *bhakti* cult and 'the Sant tradition' which 'was essentially a synthesis of the three principal dissenting movements, a compound of elements drawn mainly from Vaisnava *bhakti* and the *Hatha-yoga* of the Nath yogis, with a marginal contribution from Sufism'. But the extent of Nath and Sufi influence was admittedly small and more or less local or personal; to universalize it appears to be unwarranted. The predominant element in the so-called 'Sant synthesis' was ardent love of God which was 'the necessary religious response' in the *bhakti* cult. The *sants*, it is argued, offered their love 'not to an *avatar*, but direct to the supreme God Himself'. This can hardly be regarded as a 'fundamental difference'. Again, the word 'Sant' is given 'two specific connotations : (1) a member of the Varakari sect of Maharashtra; (2) a member

of the *Sant* tradition of Northern India, a loose fellowship of believers in a supreme, non-incarnated God.' What distinguished one group from the other is by no means clear. In any case, such subtle distinctions might be of some interest in the field of theology; history is concerned primarily with the broad features of religious movements which influence social and political developments.

On the religious reformers who followed the trail of Ramananda, simplifying and liberalising his teachings and thereby making the movement more meaningful and responsive to social urges, the greatest undoubtedly was Kabir. He was probably the most cosmopolitan of the *bhagats* of medieval India. Macauliffe says : "Kabir has written works which all religious denominations can accept, and which, if perused without bigotry, are advantageous for the salvation of all persons. Kabir was so steadfast in his utterance of God's name, that in comparison with it he deemed worthless the rules of caste and the Hindu and Muhammadan religious observances".<sup>51</sup> This cosmopolitanism was probably due in a large measure to the variety in his religious experience. He was probably born in a Muslim family and his hereditary occupation was weaving; but his mind was exposed to Hindu influence from his earliest years. In Banaras he lived in a strong Hindu environment. But Islam had a natural claim to his allegiance; there are references in his writings to his association with Muslim saints.<sup>52</sup> He seems to have been unfamiliar with sacred languages and ancient scriptures; but his association with saints of different religious denominations familiarised him with philosophical ideas and technical terms, some of which he utilised in his verses.

Torn as under by doubts and deep searchings of heart Kabir became a nonconformist; as a result he became a victim of persecution by the orthodox sections of both Hindus and Muslims.<sup>53</sup> Tradition makes him a disciple of Ramananda to whom he was driven, it is said, by his spiritual unrest. Writing in the seventeenth century the author of the *Dabistan* says : ".....at the time when he was in search of a spiritual guide, he visited the best of the Musulmans and Hindus, but did not find what he sought; at last somebody gave him direction to an old man of bright genius, the Brahman

Ramananda".<sup>54</sup> In one of the verses attributed to Kabir he himself acknowledges his debt to his Guru in the following words : "I.....was awakened by Ramananda".<sup>55</sup>

This tradition, however, has been challenged on chronological grounds. Kabir seems to have lived during the reign of Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517), the traditional date of his death being 1518. He could in that case hardly be a contemporary of Ramananda. This difficulty disappears if we accept the tradition assigning his birth to the year 1398, but in that case we have to reject the traditions relating to his meeting with Guru Nanak and Sikandar Lodi's attempt to persecute him.<sup>56</sup> The authenticity of the *Bijak*, the sacred text of the Kabirpanthis, in which we have Kabir's reference to his awakening by Ramananda, has been questioned,<sup>57</sup> although most of the verses attributed to Kabir in the *Adi Granth* are also found in a different arrangement in this collection.<sup>58</sup>

The legendary version of Kabir's first contact with Ramananda is a curious one. It is said that on one occasion Kabir lay down on the steps of a bathing *ghat* at Banaras and Ramananda, stepping on him by accident,, exclaimed 'Rama, Rama'. Kabir took this exclamation as his *mantra* and was later accepted as a disciple by Ramananda. It is not quite unlikely that this legend hints at spiritual discipleship through *mantra* without actual physical contact. The *guru* and the disciple might not have been contemporaries; they might not have entered into formal relationship even if they were contemporaries. Banaras, where Kabir lived, was the centre of Ramananda's missionary work. Here his influence was probably quite strong even after his death, which might have occurred not long before Kabir's birth. The name of Rama might have brought to Kabir spiritual satisfaction which he looked for in vain in other *mantras*. The statement in the *Dabistan*, quoted above, is strong evidence of some kind of contact between Kabir and either Ramananda himself or the Ramananda *sampradaya*.

Whatever Kabir's actual debt to Ramananda might have been, there is no doubt that he was a zealous pilgrim along the main track of the *bhakti*, cult. His mystical love of God might have been influenced by Sufism;<sup>59</sup> 'a Nath background'<sup>60</sup> may also be postulated

as a possibility. But he was in general agreement with the Vaishnava saints in treating love of God as the crucial element in the pilgrimage for salvation. Ancient philosophy did not grip his mind, although he recognised to some extent the value of both Hindu and Muslim scriptures. He had no faith in the spiritual value of external rituals and caste rules. He differed from the Vaishnava saints in his renunciation of asceticism. He says :

If salvation is achieved by living on roots and fruits alone, birds' and animals' would be the ideal lives.<sup>61</sup>

But asceticism is not entirely banned. The Kabirpanthis are permitted to live either as householders or as monks attached to a monastery belonging to the order.<sup>62</sup>

As a practical reformer Kabir made a conscious effort for Hindu-Muslim *rapprochement* in the sphere of religion. The following sayings indicate the trend of his thought :

All the men and women that are created are Your form, Kabir is the son of Allah and Rama, He is his *Guru* and *Pir*.

The Hindu and Turk have one path which the True Teacher has pointed out; says Kabir, hear, ye saints, say *Rama* or say *Khuda*.

The religion of those who understand is one, whether they are *Pandits* or *Shaikhs*.<sup>63</sup>

The fratricidal strife between Hindus and Muslims pains him :

Hindus call upon Rama, the Muslims on *Rahiman*, yet both fight and kill each other, and none knows the truth.<sup>64</sup>

The charge preferred against Kabir before Sultan Sikandar Lodi by the Muslims and Brahmins of Banaras was that those who paid heed to what he said remained neither Hindus nor Muslims.<sup>65</sup> Tradition tells us that after his death a quarrel arose between Hindus and Muslims about the disposal of the body. This is a symbolical reference to the idea that he was popularly believed to have belonged to both the communities. His decision to die at condemned Magahar in preference to holy Banaras<sup>66</sup> was a powerful blow at those rituals and conventions which dominated religion—both Hinduism and Islam—in his age.

Kabir's objective of bridging the gulf between the two communities remained unfulfilled. "The seed of the message of the



unity of Hari and Allah was not evidently sown on a fertile soil and did not sprout. Nevertheless the spirit of Kabir's teaching did not die out, and was kept alive by his numerous disciples and followers."<sup>67</sup>

Incidental to Kabir's role as a religious teacher was his contribution to vernacular literature. Westcott says : "Kabir was a poet of no mean order..... He knew that religious instruction given in the form of poetry was easily remembered; he knew too that the singing of *Bhajans* (Hymns) was an occupation in which the people of India took peculiar pleasure".<sup>68</sup> He took full advantage of oral propagation of religious ideas. He imparted religious instruction to Hindus and Muslims alike by means of *Ramainis*, *Sabads* and *Sakhis* which were easily understood by the common people. Sanskrit was losing its ancient position as the sole vehicle of religious thought.

Apart from Kabir, tradition gives us the names of eleven other disciples of Ramananda : Asananda, Surasurananda, Sukhananda, Praramananda, Mahananda, Pipa, Bhavananda, Sain, Dhanna, Sri Ananda and Rav Das. It is unlikely that all of them were initiated by Ramananda personally; some at least were probably attracted by his teachings before or after his death. The tradition which groups them together does not necessarily imply regular membership of a *sampradaya*; it is probably a testimony to the ascendancy acquired by Ramananda in the world of religion.

The *bhagats* associated by tradition with Ramananda belonged to different castes and territorial regions; collectively they reflected the all India character of the *bhakti* cult. The general uniformity of their views on spiritual and social problems leaves no room for doubt that the basic principle of their faith was one, although personal factors, combined with the differences in religious ideas and social phenomena in different parts of the country, sooner or later canalised it into different streams.

Pipa was the ruler of a small State called Gangaraungarh. Originally a worshipper of Durga, he is said to have become a monotheist as a result of his contact with Ramananda. "God", he says, "is the Primal Essence; when there is a true guru he will show him." Sain, a barbar at the court of the Raja of Rewa, is said to

have made himself a disciple of Ramananda through study of his hymns. Later on his saintliness made him the spiritual preceptor of his royal master. Addressing God as 'Lord of Lakshmi' he says : "Thy name is the best lamp, meditation thereon the purest wick.....". Dhanna, a Jat born in Rajputana, is said to have met Ramananda at Banaras and received initiation from him. He was inspired by the examples of Namdev, Kabir, Sain and Rav Das. He says : ".....I meditated on God, and accepted in my heart that He was One". Rav Das lived at Banaras and earned his living by mending shoes. His reputation for saintliness is said to have brought him two royal disciples, a queen of Mewar named Jhali, as also the celebrated Mira Bai. His rejection of traditional Hinduism was categorical. He says : "I cannot perform Thine adoration and worship according to Hindu rites".<sup>69</sup>

Apart from the *bhagats* mentioned above, the compositions of several others are represented in the *Adi Granth*. Trilochan, a Maratha saint and a contemporary of Namdev, belonged to the Vaisya caste. The kernel of his teachings is : "God is contained in every place." A firm believer in transmigration, he says : "The result of past acts is never effaced".<sup>70</sup> Another Maratha saint Paramananda lived near Pandharpur, but nothing is known about the incidents of his life. "It is said that he had the same love and affection for God as the milkmaids had for Krishan." He emphasized the spiritual value of uttering God's name as a devotional exercise. Spiritual merit, he says, is not acquired simply by hearing the Puranas. He says :

Lust thou hast not forgotten, wrath hast thou not forgotten,  
covetousness hath not left thee. Slander hath not left thy lips,  
and fruitless hath been all thy devotion.<sup>71</sup>

Guru Arjan selected some isolated hymns of some other well-known *bhagats* for inclusion in the *Adi Granth*. Sadhna, a contemporary of Namdev, was probably an inhabitant of Sind and a butcher by profession. His attitude was one of absolute surrender to the Lord; he would not resist divine will even if consigned to hell, nor would he rejoice if Heaven were bestowed on him.<sup>72</sup> Of another *bhagat*, Beni, no details are available. From 'the great difficulty of

his writings' Macauliffe infers that "he is of comparatively ancient date." Beni 'recognised the Supreme God' and considered the practice of yoga 'profitless'.<sup>73</sup> There is one hymn in the *Adi Granth* attributed to Sur Das, a learned Brahmin of the sixteenth century, who is not to be identified with the well known blind singer regarded as the author of the *Sur Sagar*.<sup>74</sup>

The *Adi Granth* gives us some hymns composed by two Muslim *bhagats*, Shaikh Farid and Bhikan. The former occupies a high position in the annals of Sufism. He is said to have been born in 1173 and to have died in 1265. Tradition tells us that the celebrated saint Nizam-ud-din Auliya was one of his disciples. We have *janam-sakhi* traditions regarding Guru Nanak's meeting with Shaikh Farid in the land of Asa and his meeting with Shaikh Brahm at Pak Pattan. Chronological difficulty eliminates the possibility of the Guru's contact with Shaikh Farid, but it is quite likely that the Guru met Shaikh Brahm. The latter was Shaikh Farid's successor and was known as Farid *Sani* or Farid the Second. Macauliffe says, "It is certain that it was Shaikh Brahm who composed the *sloks* and hymns bearing the name of Farid in the *Granth Sahib*, though he used the name of the founder of the spiritual line as his poetical *nom de plume*".

One of Shaikh Farid's *sloks* bears a close resemblance to Christian teaching :

Farid, if men beat thee with their fists,  
beat them not in return;  
*Nay*, kiss their feet and go home.

God, says Farid, dwells within the devotee's heart :  
Farid, why wanderest thou from forest to  
forest breaking down branches and thorns?  
It is in the heart that God dwelleth;  
why seekest thou Him in the forest?<sup>75</sup>

Macauliffe identifies Bhikan of the *Adi Granth* with Shaikh Bhikan of Kakori (near Lucknow) who died in the early part of Akbar's reign, but this identification is very doubtful. Badauni says, "Shaikh Bhikan was the most learned of the learned men of his time, abstemious and well-versed in the holy law, which in devout piety even Abu Hanifa, the greatest of the Imams, was his inferior".

He who satisfied Badauni's standard of learning and orthodoxy could hardly have been a liberal reformer. Macauliffe seems to be right in saying that the author of the hymns bearing the name of Bhikan in the *Adi Granth* "must have been some religious man who resembled Shaikh Farid II, and was largely tintured with the reformatory ideas then prevalent in India. It has been conjectured, with some show of probability, that Bhikan was a follower of Kabir". In any case he was a true *bhagat*. He says : "Both mine eyes are satisfied; wherever I look there is God".<sup>76</sup>

It would hardly be wrong to describe Bengal Vaishnavism as a tributary of the mainstream of the *bhakti* cult. Chaitanya, its great founder, was a contemporary of Guru Nanak, and there is some evidence to show that they met at Puri.<sup>77</sup> Born in 1486 in an orthodox Brahmin family at Navadvip, a well known centre of Sanskrit learning, he became a *sannyasin* in 1510 and is said to have disappeared in the temple of Jagannath at Puri in 1533. He made extensive tours of pilgrimage in South, West and North India. It was at his instance that the ancient sanctity of Brindaban was revived; his followers made it a great centre of Vaishnavism. His teaching was derived from the *Bhagavata Purana* and its core was the Radha-Krishna cult which Jaidev's *Gita Govinda* and the lyrics of Chandidasa had already popularised in Bengal. God, he taught, was to be approached with the emotional ardour which enlivens the lover's relation with the beloved; salvation could be attained only through a passionate love for Krishna. He rejected the Advaita doctrine of identity of the human soul with the Supreme Spirit. Primarily a mystic, he did not entirely reject customary rituals and caste rules; but caste and creed were not regarded as barriers to salvation and one of his most favourite disciples was a Muslim named Haridas (the servant of Hari). His followers made important contributions to Vaishnava philosophy and Bengali literature.

This brief survey of the development of the *bhakti* cult is intended to illustrate two points. The first is that it had its roots in ancient philosophy and constituted a distinctive feature of Indian religious thought. Secondly, through historical vicissitudes of several centuries this cult represented the resurgence of Hinduism provoked

by internal and external causes. In studying the origins of Sikhism it would be relevant to inquire how far it had affected the Punjab and provided a stimulus to the growth of a new faith.

Our starting point is the missionary work of Namdev who died before the birth of Guru Nanak and probably did not meet Ramananda. Mention has already been made of his traditional association with the Punjab and his wider contact with North India through his Hindi compositions. The inclusion in the *Adi Granth* of a large number of verses attributed to him is perhaps a testimony to the continuity of his influence in a region far away from his homeland. His ideas are close indeed to the teachings of Sikhism :

In this world is God; in the next world  
is God, *there* is no *part* of the world  
without Him.

Men who are pandits shout the Veds,  
But the ignorant Namdev *only* knoweth God.

Were I to perform the horse sacrifice,  
Give my weight *in gold* as alms,  
Bathe at Prayag,

It would not be equal, O Nama, to singing God's praises.

The Hindus worship their temple, the Musulmans their mosque,  
Nama worshipping Him who hath neither temple nor mosque.<sup>78</sup>

Only one verse attributed to Ramananda is found in the *Adi Granth*. This does not necessarily mean that his influence was no longer active or widespread in the Punjab in the days of Guru Arjan. It is more likely that he did not write much; it is possible that he preferred oral teaching to written instruction. In any case, the hymn included in the *Adi Granth* emphasizes Ramananda's faith in 'the all-pervading God' as also in the spiritual influence of 'the guru's word'.<sup>79</sup>

Traditions recording a meeting between Guru Nanak and Kabir<sup>80</sup> are to be found in the Sikh *janam-sakhis* as also in Kabirpanthi literature. These are not free from sectarian prejudice; there are inconsistencies as also confusion about details. There is, however, little chronological difficulty if we accept 1518 as the year of Kabir's death. A meeting between the two saints during the Guru's visit to Banaras was not quite unlikely. McLeod's conclusion

that "there is no authentic tradition concerning a meeting" errs too much on the side of caution. Traditions preserved by the followers of both the saints would normally have a kernel of truth so far at least as the central point, *i.e.*, the meeting, is concerned. Moreover, McLeod does not find 'adequate evidence to establish that Guru Nanak knew the works of Kabir'.<sup>81</sup> The inclusion of a very large number of Kabir's verses in the *Adi Granth* is certainly 'adequate evidence' to establish that Guru Arjan was familiar with his works. It is generally believed that Kabir's oral teaching was reduced to writing long after his—and Guru Nanak's—death; the approximate date is 1570. This does not necessarily mean that *Ramainis*, *Sabads* and *Sakhis* had not been carried to the Punjab orally in Guru Nanak's lifetime. It is not altogether impossible that Guru Nanak's utterance in *Gauri Astapadi 8* had reference to Kabir.

Among the non-Sikh *bhagats* Kabir enjoys the place of honour in the *Adi Granth*. A very large number of his verses<sup>82</sup> (*Sabads* and *Sloks*) have been included in the holy collection. His condemnation of ritual and caste, his emphasis on approach to God through love, and his recognition of the Guru's role in spiritual life remind us of some of the basic teachings of Sikhism.<sup>83</sup>

If union with God be obtained by going about naked,  
 All the deer of the forest shall be saved.  
 They who bathe in the evening and the morning,  
 Are like frogs in the water.  
 While dwelling in the womb man hath no family or caste;  
 All men have sprung from the seed of Brahm.  
 God cannot be obtained *even* by *offering* one's  
 weight in gold;  
 But I have purchased Him with my soul.  
 Nobody obeyth his parents when alive, yet he giveth  
 them feasts when dead;  
 Say how shall the poor parents obtain what the  
 ravens and the dogs have eaten.  
 They who understand the guru's instruction,  
 Lend their ears to nothing else.  
 A mother beareth not in mind  
 All the faults her son committeth.  
 O God, I am Thy child;

Why destroyest Thou not my demerits?  
 Worship the Lord, the only God,  
 Serving the guru is the true ablution.  
 As without music there cannot be dancing,  
 So without a guru *man cannot reach God's court.*

This is Kabir's reply to a Muslim priest who advised him to make a pilgrimage to Mecca :

Make thy mind thy Kaaba, thy body  
 its enclosing temple,  
 Conscience its prime teacher;  
*Then, O priest, call men to pray*  
 to that mosque  
 Which hath ten gates.

We have an echo of Kabir's idea in the following hymn of Guru Nanak addressed to a Qazi :

Make kindness thy mosque, sincerity thy  
 prayer-carpet, what is just and lawful thy Quran,  
 Modesty thy circumcision, civility thy  
 fasting, so shalt thou be a Musulman;  
 Make right conduct thy Kaaba, truth thy  
 spiritual guide, good words thy creed  
 and thy prayer,  
 The will of God thy rosary, and God will  
 preserve thine honour, O Nanak.<sup>84</sup>

Kabir was more of a mystic than Guru Nanak; his teachings had a larger proportion of obscurity and apparent inconsistency, which are probably inseparable features of religious mysticism. This seems to be one of the reasons which prevented the Kabir panthis from developing into an organised and integrated community like the Sikhs. Their doctrinal background was not as clearcut and firm as that of the Sikhs. Another crucial factor leading to the same result was the absence of centralised and continuous leadership to give the new community direction and purpose. Kabir nominated no successor, and after his death his son Kamal, approached by his disciples to found a sect, refused to do so. "My father", he said, "had striven throughout his life against all forms of sectarianism; how can I, his son, destroy his ideal and thereby commit his spiritual murder"?<sup>85</sup> The result was the dispersal of Kabir's followers, who

formed small sects under different leaders instead of coalescing into a single religious fraternity. Tradition mentions twelve groups of Kabirpanthis; in fact there are only two main divisions with headquarters at Banaras and in the Chattisgarh district in Madhya Pradesh.<sup>86</sup> Sikhism developed along entirely different lines, partly because Guru Nanak took the far-reaching step of nominating a successor, thereby ensuring unity and continuity of leadership.

Although Kabir's teachings failed to bring Hindus and Muslims on a common platform in their social relations and religious convictions, he delivered a blow at the caste system inside Hindu society. But it had too much vitality to be killed.<sup>87</sup> He upheld the dignity of a householder's life by his own example; he had a wife and children and plied his trade to earn his living. The Sikh Gurus found in Kabir a kindred spirit.

The only direct evidence of contact between Sikhism and Bengal Vaishnavism is the inclusion of two hymns<sup>88</sup> attributed to Jaidev, the celebrated author of the *Gita Govinda*, in the *Adi Granth*. Macauliffe says :

Notwithstanding the lusciousness and sensuous beauty of several parts of the *Git-Govind*, there can be no doubt that Jaidev intended the poem as an elaborate religious allegory.

The allegorical import of 'the love scenes and rhetorical graces of the poet' is insisted on by the author of the *Bhaktamala*. The allegory is thus explained by Macauliffe.

Radhika, the heroine, is heavenly wisdom. The milk maids who divert Krishan from allegiance to her, are the senses of smell, sight, touch, taste and hearing. Krishan represented as pursuing them is the human soul, which attaches itself to earthly pleasures. The return of Krishan to his first love is the return of the repentant sinner to God which gives joy in heaven.<sup>89</sup>

Such allegorical interpretation of man's spiritual efforts is alien to the direct and simple teachings of the Sikh Gurus. The *Gita Govinda* is not only 'a poetical composition of great beauty' but also 'an authoritative religious text, illustrating the refined subtleties of Vaishnava theology and *Rasa-sastra*'. Its fame travelled beyond the limits of Bengal. "It has claimed more than a dozen imitations; it has been cited extensively in the anthologies....."<sup>90</sup> The



legends incorporated in the *Bhaktamala*, some of which are echoed by Macauliffe,<sup>91</sup> show how Jaidev was glorified in the eyes of the later poets and Vaishnavas.

This glorification of Jaidev seems to be dimly reflected in the recognition paid to him by Guru Arjan. The two hymns which he selected do not occur in the *Gita Govinda*, nor do they reflect 'the refined subtleties of Vaishnava theology and *Rasa-sastra*'. Indeed, they have nothing distinctively Vaishnavic about them. The first hymn is devoted to the praise of God in general terms. The name 'Krishna' is not used; there is no allusion to Radha. The second hymn, says Macauliffe, 'is given to illustrate the practice of *jog*.' It contains the statement : "I have become blended with God as water with water." This identification of self with Brahmin is a leading feature of Sankara's Advaita philosophy; it is quite alien to the *Rasa-sastra* expounded by the Vaishnava Goswamis of Bengal. Jaidev's idea of blending with God is not basically different from Guru Nanak's concept of *Sach Khand*, 'a mingling of the individual drop in the ocean.'<sup>92</sup>

There is no reference in the *Adi Granth* to Guru Nanak's great contemporary, Chaitanya, who formulated the principles and tenets of Bengal Vaishnavism three centuries after Jaidev. Both Nanak and Chaitanya played a decisive part in shaping the great religious movement which swept over medieval India. Both of them formulated their teachings against the background of Islamic influence on Hindu religion and culture. There are some broad resemblances between the fundamental doctrine taught by them. For instance, Krishnadas Kaviraj, whose great work *Chaitanya-Charitamrita* is not only an authoritative biography of Chaitanya but also a standard exposition of the philosophy of Bengal Vaishnavism, observes :

If a creature adores Krishna and serves his Guru, he is released from the meshes of illusion and attain to Krishna's feet (*i.e.* salvation).

Again :

Leaving these (*i.e.*, temptations) and the religious systems based on caste, (the true Vaishnava) helplessly takes refuge with Krishna.<sup>93</sup>

If 'God' is substituted for 'Krishna', these statements would be a correct representation of Sikh teaching. Such substitution would be quite in conformity with the teaching of Bengal Vaishnavism, for Chaitanya and his followers regarded Krishna as God Himself and not as one of His *avatars* or incarnations.<sup>94</sup> Adoration of God and devotion to the *guru* are the leading features of Bengal Vaishnavism as also of Sikhism. But there are differences—vital differences—between the two which the historian of medieval India cannot afford to ignore. Indeed, the two movements developed along different lines and their influences on socio-religious developments did not have much in common.

Even a casual observer must be struck with the close affinity between ancient Hinduism and Bengal Vaishnavism; the breach between ancient Hinduism and Sikhism was certainly wider. While Guru Nanak makes only scanty references to the Hindu scriptures, the literature of Bengal Vaishnavism is thoroughly permeated with the Vedic and Puranic spirit and imagery. The *Bhagavata Purana* is the universally accepted primary scripture of Bengal Vaishnavism; Sikhism offers no such recognition to any ancient Sanskrit text. Although Bengal Vaishnavism imparted at least as great an impetus to the development of vernacular literature in Bengal as Sikhism did in the Punjab, yet some standard works on Bengal Vaishnavism, including a dramatic biography of Chaitanya, *Chaitanya-Chandrodaya*, were written in Sanskrit. The *Chaitanya-Charitamrita* of Krishnadas Kaviraj is written in Bengali, but it is interspersed with Sanskrit *slokas* quoted from the *Bhagavata Purana*, *Gita*, and other works. The most authentic philosophical exposition of *Rasa-sastra* is to be found in the difficult Sanskrit works written by the revered Goswamis, Sanatana, Rupa and Jiva.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, the Vaishnavas of Bengal did not try to dislodge Sanskrit from the position of sacred language of the Hindus, although they composed poetical work and lyrics—all of them religious or semi-religious in character—in the Bengali language.

The antecedents of the founder and expounders of Bengal Vaishnavism explain this curious devotion of an essentially popular religion to the language and philosophy of ancient Hinduism.

Chaitanya was a profound Sanskrit scholar. His proficiency in Grammar and Logic excited the wonder of Navadvip, one of the greatest centres of Sanskrit learning in those days. He set up as a teacher in his early youth. Unlike Guru Nanak, who did not come from the highest stratum of Hindu society, Chaitanya was a Brahmin. The environments in which they lived were also radically different. Guru Nanak passed his impressionable years in rural areas subject to predominantly Islamic influence, but Chaitanya grew up in a centre of orthodox Hindu learning although Bengal was then under Muslim rule. Naturally their outlook on life and religion was different. Chaitanya quoted Sanskrit *slokas* when he was in ecstasy; he loved to reside at Puri, a sacred place of pilgrimage for the orthodox Hindus. His religion was rooted deeply in the past. His followers did nothing to initiate or to encourage a new departure. Men like Sanatana, Rupa, Jiva and Krishnadas Kaviraj were deeply versed in ancient learning; the successors of Guru Nanak were not masters of the Hindu scriptures which they did not regard as holding the key to spiritual uplift.

Centuries of tradition had familiarised the Hindus with Vedic and Puranic stories and ideas. Sikhism, a religion which was based on the total denial of the spiritual value of these stories and ideas, appeared to them as a novel deviation from all that they revered. Vaishnavism in Bengal did not in this respect involve a breach with the past. Throughout the orthodox section of the Hindu society Krishna was regarded as a deity to be worshipped. The Vaishnava emphasis on the idea, derived from the *Bhagavata Purana*, that Krishna was God (not a mere incarnation of God) was not in itself enough to create a gulf between orthodoxy and reform. In explaining and justifying their religious position the Vaishnavas appealed to some of the *sastras* which the orthodox Hindus revered (for examples, *Gita*, *Bhagavata Purana*, etc.) and utilised the language which the latter regarded as sacred.

One of the natural effects of this difference between Sikhism and Bengal Vaishnavism was that, while the former found acceptance primarily among a comparatively uneducated and socially inferior population, the latter appealed to high and low alike,

to the learned as well as to the illiterate. The converts to Sikhism belonged mainly to the agricultural class, deprived of the blessings of learning by the social and religious conventions of those days, quite unfamiliar with the *sastras* and infinitely less open to their influence. They easily appreciated a religion which improved their social position and promised salvation through simple devotion and service. But the higher classes, more or less educated and familiar with Vedic and Puranic ideas, were conscious that Sikhism represented a definite breach with the past. Naturally they were not as anxious as the agricultural class to get rid of traditions and conventions.<sup>96</sup> Vaishnavism also presented this dilemma to the high-caste and educated Hindus of Bengal, but in a far less acute degree. While the Brahmins of the Punjab could not embrace Sikhism without cutting themselves adrift from the century-old moorings of their society, the Brahmins of Bengal could with much less difficulty transfer their allegiance to a reformed faith ostensibly based on ancient and venerated scriptures.

Despite close links with the scriptural heritage Bengal Vaishnavism began with a social programme more or less similar to that of Guru Nanak, but in the long run it could not prevent the virtually complete merger of Chaitanya's followers in the general body of the Hindu society. To some extent the social disabilities under which the lower castes had been living in old Brahmanical society were removed through the newly introduced Vaishnava practices. As a challenge to the traditional monopoly of the Brahmins in the sphere of spiritual guidance qualified non-Brahmins—even of the so-called untouchable castes—were admitted into the ministry of the new congregation. They became *gurus* (spiritual guides or preceptors)<sup>97</sup> of the new community, taking equal place with the Brahmins who joined the new movement. Moreover, with a view to liberalising social practices Chaitanya and his associates simplified the ancient laws and customs regarding important socio-religious ceremonies such as marriage and *sradh*.

If this liberal trend had continued and developed, there would have been a revolutionary transformation of the Bengali society. But the potentialities of early Vaishnavism were crippled by

infectious germs of firm orthodoxy within its own fold. Converts coming from the higher castes—Brahmins, Vaidyas, Kayasthas—were not prepared to sacrifice their high social position to the unorthodox demands of the new system. They adopted the spiritual laws of Vaishnavism, *i.e.* they accepted initiation at the hands of the Vaishnava *gurus* as also the prescribed spiritual and subjective disciplines. In respect of social affairs, however, they remained loyal to their old family traditions. On the whole the general laws and practices of Hindu society remained current among the upper-caste Vaishnavas. Thus the new community of Vaishnavas in Bengal was divided almost from the very beginning into two sections, one continuing its loyalty to the social aspect of the old Brahmanical system, the other adopting unorthodox social practices, particularly in the matter of marriage. Deviation from orthodoxy gradually condemned the latter to a low social position.<sup>98</sup>

There was no analogous process in Sikh society. The limited entry of the higher castes into the fold of the new faith kept it comparatively free from the emergence of rigid social distinctions and the development of non-egalitarian forces. The continuous impact of the Guru's teachings prevented bifurcation of life into social and religious aspects. The idea that life is an integrated whole took firm root in Sikh society. In such an environment it was hardly possible for any particular group to be simultaneously liberal in religion and orthodox in social matters.

So far as the form of worship was concerned, Bengal Vaishnavism reduced the importance of caste in conformity with the general spirit of the *bhakti* cult. According to the Bengal Vaishnavas, the highest and purest worship of the Lord consists in the repetition of His holy name. "This required no rituals, offerings of flowers or leaves or edibles to the Deity, or the services of the Brahmins. Whoever took the name of the Lord became purified by that one single act and was qualified to worship the Lord. In this way the Bengal Vaishnava cult.....granted the highest religious franchise, hitherto enjoyed by the Brahmins only, to all men and women, irrespective of all considerations of birth, parentage and social status."<sup>99</sup> In this respect Sikhism traversed common ground

with Bengal Vaishnavism.

In conclusion, it may be observed that there is a vital difference between the monotheism of the Sikhs and the concept of God in Bengal Vaishnavism. The cardinal point in the Sikh doctrine is that God is formless. But the Krishna (or the ultimate reality) of the Vaishnavas is not *nirakara* (without a form); Chaitanya described Him as *chidakara* (possessing a spiritual body). The Vaishnava standpoint has been explained in the following words :

In every.....system, whether Hindu Vaishnavic or Saiva or Christian or Islam or Judaic, which accepts the worship of the Lord as an eternal deity we must concede to the Lord some notes or marks of differentiation from His worshipper. Bengal Vaishnavism declares that these notes or marks, or, in a word, this 'form' of the Lord, is not material but spiritual. The Lord, therefore, is not without form but has a spiritual form of His own. The Lord is not without body but has a spiritual body.<sup>100</sup>

Very few worshippers, however, could conceive of this spiritual body. The deep-rooted influence of the ancient Brahmanical form of worship remained unaffected by what appeared to most of the devotees as a nebulous or elusive concept of the deity. Moreover, the emphasis on love (*prem*) humanised the object of worship. The natural result was the practical recognition of image worship by the vast majority of the Vaishnavas in Bengal.

This broad review of the development of the *bhakti* cult is intended to put the origin and progress of Sikhism in the perspective of the Medieval Reformation. Macauliffe rightly says : "Abrupt indigenous alterations of religion have rarely, if ever, been presented to human experience". He adds that "saints and thinkers who were dissatisfied with the superstitions and religious vagaries of the Hindus.....gradually evolved a belief in one God and preceded Guru Nanak as the dawn before sunrise".<sup>101</sup> The 'dawn' was rich in thought; the 'sunrise' brought it into more fruitful contact with the life of the people by giving it greater coherence and converting it into a self-sufficient code of temporal and spiritual duties. Chronologically the last of the great medieval leaders of religion, Guru Nanak brought a new synthesis to scattered ideas which formed his heritage.

By incorporating in the *Adi Granth* a very large number of compositions of the earlier 'saints and thinkers' Guru Arjan gave formal recognition to Sikhism's links with the past. Macauliffe suggests that this was done with a purpose : it was 'the intention of Guru Arjan himself (he says) to provide material which would enable the reader 'to follow the historical development of the Sikh reformation'.<sup>102</sup> It is difficult to believe that the fifth Guru had any such purpose at all. His sole object was to provide for the Sikhs an authentic collection of 'true songs' which Guru Amar Das had asked his followers to sing.<sup>103</sup> The modern idea of 'historical development' must have been very far from his mind. But what he actually did serves a very important historical purpose for modern students of Sikhism. It shows that Guru Nanak's teachings had close links with the *bhakti* cult which, in its different forms, dominated Indian religious thought for centuries. We are thus led to the broad conclusion that Sikhism derived inspiration and vigour from the perennial spring of India's spiritual life.

The object which Guru Arjan had in view in accepting the compositions of so many non-Sikh *bhagats* in the holy collection of 'true songs' is thus explained by Macauliffe :

According to the Hindu religion it was deemed a sin to listen to the teaching of Musulmans, to say nothing of that of Sudars. It was one of the Guru's objects to show the world that there was no such superstition in the Sikh religion, and that every good man, no matter of what caste or creed, was worthy of honour and reverence.<sup>104</sup>

There must have been some 'good men' among the orthodox Brahmins, the orthodox Muslims, and the Jogis who played an important role in the religious life of North India in Guru Nanak's age. Compositions expressing their point of view were not accepted by Guru Arjan. The principle of selection adopted by him is thus stated by Macauliffe : "The followers of the principal Indian saints, Hindu and Muhammadan, since the days of Jaidev..... repeated hymns of their respective sects; and such as conformed to the spirit of reform then in vogue, or were not wholly inconsistent with the Guru's teaching, were adopted and incorporated in the Granth."<sup>105</sup>

Elsewhere Macauliffe changes his ground to some extent and says that with a view to explaining 'the historical development of the Sikh reformation' Guru Arjan 'included in his compilation hymns quite opposed to the principles and tenets of his predecessors'.<sup>106</sup> I, Banerjee raises a very pertinent question. "Is it conceivable", he asks, "that Guru Arjan had incorporated in such a work writings which were opposed to the principles that he advocated?.....there is nothing in these hymns which is opposed to the principles and tenets of Sikhism, as Guru Arjan understood them".<sup>107</sup> As a Sikh writer says, he 'chose only those hymns which echoed sentiments he wanted to inculcate in his own community'.<sup>108</sup> That the Guru was extremely scrupulous in respect of selection is clear from his rejection of a hymn composed by Mira Bai on the ground that she lived and died an idolator.<sup>109</sup>

A study of the lives and compositions of the non-Sikh *bhagats* whom Guru Arjan accorded a place of honour in the *Adi Granth* would justify our conclusion that Sikhism had close links with the *bhakti* cult. The exclusion of the orthodox Hindu and Muslim points of view as also of the ideas of the Jogis was inevitable in the context of Guru Nanak's teachings; these were entirely alien to the basic tenets of Sikhism and could be cited only for the purposes of criticism and condemnation. In the Hindu and Muslim *bhagats*, however, the fifth Guru found kindred spirits; with their basic ideas there was a general agreement although there might be differences in respect of particular expressions. By embellishing the holy *Granth* with beautiful literary expression of their yearning for God Sikhism emphasized its catholicity and its respect for spiritual urge overriding caste, sect and creed.



CHAPTER III  
SOCIETY AND RELIGION IN THE PUNJAB

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For the Muslim invaders—from Mahmud of Ghazni in the eleventh century to Zaman Shah, the Afghan, in the eighteenth—the Punjab was the gateway to India. We may remember Guru Nanak's piercing words referring to Babur's invasion :

With evil as his best man,  
Bringing a crowd of sins as his bridal procession,  
Like a bridegroom Babar hath hasted from Kabul,  
To seize by force as his bride,  
O Lallo,  
The wealth of Hindustan.<sup>1</sup>

After the 'reading of the marriage services by the devil' (as the Guru says) was over the bridegroom settled in his new home; conquest was followed by consolidation. This was the Punjab's experience for several centuries. In the trail of the conquering armies in the eleventh century came a new faith, a new culture, a new way of life; a continuous stream of warriors, administrators, theologians and saints crossed the north-western mountain passes and gave medieval India its form and colour. Even during the period of Ghaznavid rule Lahore was a well-known centre of Islamic culture. There was constant intercourse between Afghanistan, Persia, Transoxiana and Khorasan on the one side and the Punjab on the other. "Nobles and scholars migrated to the conquered country, settled down there, temporarily or permanently, and laid the first foundations of the Indo-Muslim culture that was to find its highest perfection in the time of the Great Mughals".

The process of migration from Muslim countries was accelerated by the military exploits of Chengiz Khan and his successors in the thirteenth century. The Muslim world was shaken

to its very foundations by the cruel victories of the 'curse of God' and many notable families<sup>2</sup> left the lands of their ancestors to seek refuge in India where the Sultans of Delhi tried earnestly, and on the whole successfully, to resist the Mongol tide. Delhi came to be known as *Qubbat-ul-Islam* (cupola of Islam). Among the refugees from the Mongol fury were *ulama*, Sufis, poets and philosophers.<sup>3</sup> When the *Sultanat* declined the provincial kingdoms provided asylum for the learned. "Timur's invasion probably drove the learned to the provincial courts; provincial cultural centres now came into prominence".<sup>4</sup> The dispersal of culture was one of the results of political disintegration.

Of all Indian provinces other than Sind, the Punjab had the longest and the most varied experience of Muslim rule; it was virtually the sole victim of Mongol raids and Timur's invasion. Naturally the impact of Islam in all its aspects—military, political, religious, social—fell most powerfully on the Punjab. In the eleventh century it virtually became a part, both politically and culturally, of the great Muslim world which extended from the frontiers of France to those of China. During the ancient period a strange combination of orthodoxy and adaptability had enabled Hindu culture to assimilate the civilised Greeks and the barbarous Sakas and Hunas. From the eleventh century onwards it came face to face against a virile and composite culture backed by the enormous military strength of the Turks. Islam was too strange and too strong to be submerged under the old indigenous faith which had already lost its ancient ardour and vitality; its capacity for absorption had been exhausted. The new faith, in its turn, was not strong enough to absorb the militarily vanquished people within its fold. Hinduism, with all its narrowness, was yet capable of resisting the process which had overwhelmed the old religions of Western Asia and Africa. The inevitable result was conflict within the framework of geographical and social co-existence. As Sir John Marshall observes :

Seldom in the history of mankind has the spectacle been witnessed of two civilisations, so vast and so strongly developed, yet so radically dissimilar as the Muhammadan and Hindu, meeting and mingling together. The very contrasts which

existed between them, the wide divergence in their culture and their religion, make the history of their impact peculiarly instructive.....<sup>5</sup>

A study of the history of this impact is beyond our scope, but we cannot accept such exaggerated simplification of history as the following curious generalisation :

There was not cultural conflict between the Muslims and the Hindus. In fact the cultural forces were rapidly leading to a complete fusion between the two.....<sup>6</sup>

Toynbee is much nearer the truth when he says :

On the whole the story of the relations between these two great religions on Indian ground has been an unhappy tale of mutual misunderstanding and hostility.<sup>7</sup>

This 'unhappy tale of misunderstanding and hostility' was a persistent feature of the history of the Sikhs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The reaction of the Sikh society to the unenlightened policy of the Mughal State during the long period from the martyrdom of the fifth Guru to the rise of Ahmad Shah Abdali cannot be explained in terms of 'complete fusion' of cultural forces in the country. Even in the liberal regime of Akbar Guru Amar Das had to face troubles from his Muslim neighbours at Goindwal. Saints and Sufis had tried to bridge the gulf, but their teachings fell to a large extent on barren soil. Kabir said :

The Jogis cry out 'Gorakh, Gorakh';  
The Hindus repeat 'Ram, Ram';  
The Musulmans have Khuda,  
But Kabir's God is the All-prevading.<sup>8</sup>

At Mecca, it is said, Guru Nanak told the *Qazis* and the *Mullas* :  
Both sects (Hindus and Muslims) are jealous of each other.  
The Hindus insist on saying Ram and the Muslims Rahim, but they know not the one God.<sup>9</sup>

Islam came as a powerful challenge to Hinduism. Apart from the political patronage at its disposal it had two distinct advantages. In the first place, it was a proselytizing faith and laid great emphasis on conversion of infidels. Hinduism, on the other hand, had long ago taken shelter (as Alberuni noted) inside a self-created shell. Gone were the days when it had an overflowing vitality capable of bringing

foreigners within its fold. The leaders of Hindu society could not think of converting the Muslims according to precedents laid down by their predecessors in the case of the Greeks, the Sakas, the Hunas and other Central Asian tribes. The monotheism of Islam was basically inconsistent with the worship of numberless deities which characterised current Hinduism. The Islamic social system could not be accommodated within the caste-structure of Hindu society. Forced into a defensive position the leaders of Hindu society tried to protect religious purity and social solidarity by penalising all supposedly contaminating contact with the new *yavanas*. This policy of exclusion was certainly a weak instrument of defence; it made the Hindu community a shrinking unit, facing without self-confidence the aggressive and expansive unit of Islam.

One important point, however, deserves consideration in this connection. Islam had at its back a highly developed civilisation which was entirely lacking in the case of earlier Central Asian invaders. Its rigidity was a protective armour which the Greeks did not possess. Moreover, Hinduism had lost its old capacity for adjustment with new situations; it was a prisoner of the past, incapable of releasing fresh ideas and forces of rejuvenation. A pathetic faith in its own superiority closed the eyes of the Hindu society to the grim realities flowing from the onslaught of Islam. In these circumstances it was practically impossible to repeat the old process of conversion of foreigners. The number of Muslims attracted towards Sikhism—a monotheistic faith like Islam—was inconsiderable. Hinduism with its numberless gods and cruel rules of caste could hardly expect any success at all.

The second important advantage of Islam in its confrontation with Hinduism was its profession of social equality. It opened its door wide to receive the lower castes among the Hindus who had been suffering for centuries from various types of social tyranny. This promise of social liberation was probably effective in certain regions,<sup>10</sup> but its importance should not be exaggerated. That the lower orders of Hindu society made no general response to the tempting offer of Islam is quite evident from the large proportion of the so-called untouchables surviving in Hindu society even to-day.

Despite its tyranny caste held the people of India in firm grip; even Islam was incapable of cutting off its roots. After five centuries of Muslim rule in the Punjab and three centuries of Muslim rule in Delhi Babur found all craftsmen organised in rigid and exclusive castes.<sup>11</sup>

Social equality in Islam in its new Indian home had certain practical limitations. The Turkish aristocracy was a closed group, jealously protecting its political and economic privileges; Hindus converted to Islam had no prospect of entry into that charmed circle. Far more important from the common man's point of view was the fact that there were different social classes within the fold of Islam itself. Three classes are mentioned in Khavand Mir's *Humayun Nama*<sup>12</sup> : (1) the *Ahl-i-daulat*, or the ruling class, comprising the royal family, the nobility and the army; (2) the *Ahl-i-sa'adat*, or the intelligentsia, comprising the *ulama*, the *Qazis*, the *Sayyids*, men of learning, and men of letters; (3) the *Ahl-i-murad*, or the class catering for pleasures, comprising musicians, minstrels and dancing girls. The classification is obviously incomplete and unsatisfactory; for example, it does not take note of the producing classes, the peasantry and the artisans, who formed the backbone of State and society. Apart from social distinctions which were more meaningful in medieval times than they are to-day, there were striking economic disparities. Under Ibrahim Lodi the pay of a common soldier ranged from 20 to 30 *tankas*. The economic position of the nobility is reflected in Abbas Khan Sherwani's statement that one particular Afghan nobleman possessed 300 *maunds* of gold.<sup>13</sup> Socio-economic equality was more or less effective only within the limited range of a class, and not within the Muslim society as a whole. Islam, says a Muslim writer,<sup>14</sup> "succumbed to the spirit of class division, and forgot all about the message of the Quran". This might have been one of the factors which affected the attractiveness of Islam's appeal to the Hindu masses.

Apart from those who were forced or persuaded to embrace Islam, the Hindus remained loyal to the caste system which was both an integrating and a disintegrating factor. But this loyalty was subjected to attack from different quarters. There was a telling

contrast provided by Islam. The *bhakti* cult was critical of the caste system. Guru Nanak condemns caste as 'folly'. "He is a Brahman who knoweth God", he says.<sup>15</sup> The test of man's excellence is not birth but progress at the spiritual level. Birth, in Kabir's view, is an accident. He says :

While dwelling in the womb man hath not family or caste; All men have sprung from the seed of Brahm.<sup>16</sup>

From this follows Kabir's challenge to the Brahmin's claim to superiority :

Say, O Pandit, since when hast thou been a Brahman;  
Waste not thy life in calling thyself a Brahman.  
If thou art a Brahman born of a Brahmani mother,  
Why hast thou not come by some other way?<sup>17</sup>  
How art thou a Brahman? How am I a Sudar?  
How am I of blood and you of milk?  
Saith Kabir, only he who meditateth on God  
Is a Brahman in my estimation.<sup>18</sup>

These saintly utterances on the basis and meaning of caste, however, had little practical effect on Hindu society in general; the ascendancy of the Brahmins was not shaken although it is possible that the foundations of their authority—moral and religious—were no longer as firm as they had been in the past. The establishment of foreign rule, however, led to a definite deterioration in their actual position. They lost their traditional association with the State and its ruling class. This, in itself, was a vital erosion into their age-old ascendancy. Deprived of all chances of influencing royal policy and securing employment in high offices of the State, they had to fall back exclusively upon their priestly functions. Astrology and medicine provided alternative or supplementary avenues of earning a living. There are references to astrologers in connection with some incidents of Guru Nanak's life.<sup>19</sup> A Pandit claimed :

By the will of God I teach the people the fourteen sciences—reading, swimming, medicine, alchemy, astrology, singing the six ragas and their raginis, the science of sexual enjoyment, grammar, music, horsemanship, archery, theology, and statesmanship.

Guru Nanak's view on the futility of astrology is categorical :

By astrological calculations, thou hast  
prepared the horoscope.

Thou readest and relatest but hast not  
gone in quest of the reality.....

Thou makest calculations but thy soul  
is in the anguish of delusion.<sup>20</sup>

The Brahmins' study of holy books is superficial and consequently useless, says Guru Nanak.

The Pandits go through the holy books,  
but do not understand their substance.

They give advice to others; this is the  
trade of mammon.<sup>21</sup>

The 'trade of mammon' seems to have provided the Brahmins not only with tolerable means of livelihood but also with considerable influence on the general masses of the people. But they could not stimulate Hindu society either intellectually or spiritually. They succeeded in converting religion into a lifeless string of formalities and in promoting social arthritis.

Belief in astrology was by no means a monopoly of the Hindus. There are stories of taking omens in the *Memoirs* of Timur and Babur. The Muslim rulers and nobles used horoscopes and charms. "Even the minutest detail of royal life was regulated by the court astrologers and other masters of occult and mysterious sciences."<sup>22</sup>

In Amir Khusrau's *Nuh Sipih* we have an interesting account of the cultural, religious; and social conditions of India in the days of the poet. He says that the Indians are very proficient in all branches of philosophy and learning, that learning is widespread among them, and that while foreign scholars very often come to India to study here, the people of this country are so advanced that they never feel the need of going to other countries for purpose of adding to their knowledge. This is an enthusiastic testimony of an accomplished member of the conquering race, whose judgement in this matter was not affected by political considerations or personal prejudices. It seems to indicate that the Hindus—apparently the Brahmins who had a monopoly of learning—had a vigorous intellectual life in the first century of Muslim rule. But if we take the period of the *Sultanat*

as a whole we notice a marked decline in literary and philosophical creativity in respect of quality.

Political conditions did not materially affect Sanskrit literature, and despite growing Muslim domination in parts of the country literary works continued to be produced. The creative period, however, had long been a matter of the past, there being little of intrinsic merit, though the production is immense and almost every branch of literature is represented. There is no originality. Works seem to be produced only for the learned : there was no contact with the masses. This period shows a growing tendency among the authors to write school texts.<sup>23</sup>

The establishment of Muslim rule seems to have crippled the creative genius of the Hindus. Deprived of state patronage in territories under the Muslim rulers, Hindu literary and philosophical talent was driven to the still surviving political islands under Hindu rule.

The patronage extended by the Hindu rulers of Vijayanagara, Warangal, Gujarat, etc. resulted in the concentration of scholars in these regions, and the production of standard works in different branches by the authors patronised in these courts.<sup>24</sup>

Following the old tradition of royal poets and scholars, Hindu rulers like Hammira, Kumbhakarna, Prataparudra and Krishnadevaraya made personal contributions to different branches of literature. The only notable instance of a Muslim ruler's interest in Sanskrit is the translation of some Sanskrit works into Persian under the patronage of Sikandar Lodi.

If the withdrawal of State patronage contributed to the decadence of Hindu intellectual life, the exclusion of the Hindus from the aristocracy and the bureaucracy—from eminence in court, politics, and administration—crippled their capacity for management of practical affairs. It was—to quote pregnant words used by Sir Thomas Munro in 1824—a 'sentence of degradation on a whole people'. Referring to the question of employment of Indians in public service under the East India Company he observed :

What is, in every age and every country, the great stimulus to the pursuit of knowledge but the prospect of fame, or wealth, or power? Or what is even the use of great attainments if they are not to be devoted to their noblest purpose, the service of



the community.....?..... Without the prospect of such reward, no attainments in science will ever raise the character of the people.<sup>25</sup>

The 'sentence of degradation on a whole people' was in operation in the social sphere as well. There were galling restrictions on the personal dress and movement of the Hindus as also on their social ceremonies. In Dera Ghazi Khan, it is said, a Hindu could ride only a donkey.<sup>26</sup>

Guru Nanak's watchful eyes noticed clear, symptoms of the crippling effect of foreign rule on the Hindus. He found them trying to please their Muslim masters by mimicking their manners, by eating meat prepared in the Muslim fashion, and by using Muslim names for themselves. Even the Kshatriyas—the fighting caste—had lost their virility. The Guru says :

The Kshatriyas have forsaken their religion and adopted the language of Malechhas.<sup>27</sup>

The Guru speaks of all-pervading degeneration :

In this age of darkness,  
Men have become as dogs,  
They eat the ill-gotten gains,  
And bark out their lies.<sup>28</sup>

'In this age of darkness' Hindu society did not accord to women the respect which was due to them. The cruel practice of *Sati* (the immolation of women on their husband's pyres) was prevalent and Kabir criticised it.<sup>29</sup> Guru Nanak's recognition of the social status of women is a pleasant and meaningful departure from medieval ideas. It is expressed in noble words :

Of a woman are we conceived,  
of a woman we are born,  
To a woman are we betrothed and married,  
It is a woman who is friend and partner of life,  
It is a woman who keeps the race going,  
Another companion is sought when the life-partner dies,  
Through woman are established social ties.  
Why should we consider woman cursed and condemned  
When from woman are born leaders and rulers?  
From woman alone is born a woman,  
Without woman there can be no human birth.

Without woman, O Nanak, only the True One exists.<sup>30</sup>

This generous tribute to the role of women in the preservation and proper functioning of society is in complete accord with the position assigned to the householder in the Sikh religion. Those who seek salvation need not keep themselves aloof from women and treat their company as a sinful barrier to spiritual efforts. Both Kabir and Guru Nanak lived a householder's life. In nominating his successor Guru Nanak preferred a disciple who had a wife and children. The concept of woman as man's helpmate became one of the distinctive features of Sikh society.

Political predominance invested Muslim society with a kind of vigour in practical affairs which was lacking in the suppressed community, but intellectually and morally it was suffering from similar barrenness and corruption. Indo-Persian literature can boast of quantitative exuberance, but the standard of qualitative achievement is not high enough to satisfy exacting critics. A recognised authority on the subject assures us that "Persian literature produced in India has not, as a rule, the real Persian flavour,.....which belongs to the indigenous product".<sup>31</sup> The many-sided genius of Amir Khusrau<sup>32</sup> made him a well-known figure in the literary history of the *Sultanat*, but later writers concerned themselves mostly with the composition of historical chronicles and theological treatises. Moreover, the contributors to Indo-Persian literature during the period of the *Sultanat* were 'mostly Persians by nationality or persons of Persian origin'.<sup>33</sup> Like English under British rule, Persian under Muslim rule remained a precious imported product, used by a small section of the people for literary and official work; it could not become an integral part of national inheritance, nor could it promote the flowering of indigenous genius. The greatest poet of the Lodi period was Shaikh Jamal-ud-din of Delhi,<sup>34</sup> whose works, the *Siyar-ul-Arifin* and the *Mihr-u-Mah*, are known only to a small circle of experts.

The socio-religious life of the Muslim community was dominated by the *ulama* who also played an important role in politics. Balban accused them of want of truthfulness and courage. Amir Khusrau accused them of hypocrisy, vanity and conceit. The *Qazis*,

he said, were ignorant of Muslim law and otherwise unfit to occupy any responsible position. Barani, a distinguished theologian, admits that he himself, along with others of his class, helped the Sultans in openly violating the religious injunctions of Islam by deliberately stretching the meaning of Quranic texts for no purpose other than that of carrying out the desires of the rulers.<sup>35</sup> In view of such confessions it is difficult to accept the contention of a modern writer that the *ulama* really cared for the welfare of the common people.<sup>36</sup> The better view (urged by another modern writer) seems to be that they 'abdicated from their office of leading the Muslims in the path of virtue and piety'.<sup>37</sup>

The *Sayyids*, or persons claiming descent from the Prophet, constituted a highly respected social group. Timur protected the lives of the *Sayyids* and other Muslims of the religious classes. The privileges of the *Sayyids* were scrupulously respected by the Lodis. A *Sayyid* of Koil, accused of having misappropriated State revenue, was tried before Sikandar Lodi. Despite strong evidence against him, he was not only discharged but permitted to enjoy the fruits of his dishonesty.<sup>38</sup>

The degeneration of the *ulama* through involvement in politics and in self-seeking pursuits led to the emergence of a new class of spiritual preceptors, the *Pirs* and *Shaikhs*, whose descendants (*Pirzadas* and *Makhdumzadas*) also enjoyed hereditary veneration. Some nobles of Buhlul Lodi offered their heads to a *Pir* so that he could sit there if he wished. In the *Tarikh-i-Daudi* we find an Afghan noble explaining to a Hindu noble that a *Shaikhzada* occupied the same position among Muslims as a Brahmin did among Hindus.<sup>39</sup>

This analogy between Muslim religious preceptors and Brahmins is one of the many examples of the absorption of Hindu customs and prejudices by Islam in the Indian environment. Mention has been made above of belief in astrology. Belief in occult phenomena had infected the Muslim community. On one occasion Guru Nanak was supposed to have been possessed with an evil spirit, and a Muslim priest or *Mulla* was summoned to exercise it.<sup>40</sup> Ibn Batuta refers to Muhammad bin Tughluq's interest in the occult

demonstrations of the Jogis. Pilgrimage to tombs of saints was a widely prevalent religious custom among Muslims. The Rajput custom of *jauhar* was occasionally imitated in Muslim society. At the time of Timur's invasion Kamal-ud-din, governor of Bhatnir, along with his retainers, burned their women and then fought like 'blood-thirsty devils'.

The social life of the Muslims was to some extent Indianised in some of its essential features. Islam did not recognise the caste system, but something approaching it developed among the Muslim aristocrats of foreign birth, particularly in connection with matrimony. The use of umbrellas and elephants as emblems of authority and magnificence, of ornaments (rings, necklaces, and ear-rings) by men, of rich spices for cooking food, etc., represented visible borrowing by Muslims from their Hindu neighbours. Muslim rulers and nobles imitated their Hindu counterparts in employing professional jesters and mountebanks on their staff of attendants, although this type of amusement appeared as scandalous in the eyes of orthodox theologians.

In a society honeycombed with racial arrogance, social exclusiveness and superstitions of diverse kinds, religion could hardly be anything but a formal, shapeless system of arid beliefs and lifeless rituals. This was the general characteristic of the age, a common vice infecting both Hinduism and Islam. The 'age of darkness' was dark for both communities. This is what Guru Nanak says about the Hindus :

*Though men commit* countless thefts, countless adulteries, utter  
countless falsehoods and countless words of abuse;

*Though they commit* countless robberies and villainies night  
and day against their *fellow* creatures;

*Yet* the cotton thread is spun, and the Brahman cometh to twist  
it.

*For the ceremony* they kill a goat and cook and eat it, and  
everybody then saith, 'Put on the *janeu*'.<sup>41</sup>

The worship of God had been reduced to futile rituals which brought neither spiritual joy nor material comfort.

Thou in thy house keepest an idol with its attendant gods.

Thou washest it and worshipping it;

Thou offerest it kungu, sandal, and flowers;  
 Thou fallest at its feet and propitiatest it to the utmost;  
 Yet it is by continually begging of men thou clothest and  
 supportest thyself.  
 For such foolish acts shalt thou receive the punishment of the  
 foolish.  
 The idol giveth thee not when hungry, nor preserveth thee  
 from death.<sup>42</sup>

The corrosive process was at work in Muslim society as well,  
 and Guru Nanak invited its attention to the essentials of the faith  
 which it professed. "To be a Mussulman", says the Guru, "is not  
 easy".

Make your mosque the abode of kindness  
 In it spread the prayer-mat of faith,  
 And as you read the *Koran* think of what is just and what is  
 lawful.  
 Let modesty be your circumcision—your pledge to God  
 Gentle acts the fast of Ramadan.  
 Thus will you be a good Mussulman.  
 Let righteous conduct be your *Kaaba*,  
 And truth your spiritual guide.  
 Let deed of piety and prayer be your creed and what is pleasing  
 to the Lord your rosary of beads.<sup>43</sup>

Elsewhere the Guru warns the believers in Islam against  
 acceptance of false religious teachers :

Shaikhs, Disciples and Pirs weep  
 For fear of suffering at the last moment.<sup>44</sup>

In Guru Nanak's verses we have several references to a class  
 of Muslim *faqirs* called *Jangam*.<sup>45</sup> According to Macauliffe,  
*Jangam* was the name of a class of *faqirs* with matted hair and  
 thin chains to their feet who generally went about ringing bells.  
 Apparently they had similarities with Hindu *sannyasis* who believed  
 in salvation through mortification of the flesh. The literal meaning  
 of the word implies that they were always moving about, *i.e.*, they  
 did not live in any one place for long. There was another class of  
 Muslim *faqirs* known as *Qalandar*. On one occasion Guru Nanak  
 is said to have carried on his head the hat of a *Qalandar*.<sup>46</sup>  
 According to Macauliffe, a *Qalandar* is a Muslim anchorite who

abandons all worldly ties and possessions and corresponds to the Hindu *sannyasi*. The *Qalandars* were generally wandering *dervishes*, wearing blue cloaks, allied with the Sufis of the Chishti and Suhrawardi orders. Engrossed in a state of *sukr* (mystic intoxication) they 'confined their religious activities to the obligatory part of religious observances only and did not pay any heed to the formalities of social life and material needs'. They were unable, it is said, 'to distinguish between things lawful and unlawful'. These roving mendicants condemned the *khanaqah* life favoured by the regular Sufis. Some of them demonstrated their spiritual power through magic and occult practices. Asceticism seems to have made some progress among those Muslims to whom the call of religion was irresistible. The following *slok* of Shaikh Farid beautifully expresses the idea of other-worldliness :

I have tied and taken up my bundle of *worldliness*;  
whither shall I go to throw it away?<sup>47</sup>

The most interesting feature of Islam in Guru Nanak days was Sufism. The Sufis were mystics, deriving their name from garments of coarse wool (*suf*) which they wore as a badge of poverty (*faqr*). They did not form an organised sect, nor did they have any uniform code of religious doctrines. The variety of their ideas and practices was due to the intermixture of Quranic, Christian, neo-Platonic, Zoroastrian, Buddhist and Hindu elements. Vedanta also contributed to their ideas and some Yogic practices such as *pranayama* were an integral part of their spiritual discipline. Sufism has been rightly compared to 'a stream which gathers volume by the joining of tributaries from many lands'.<sup>48</sup>

The early Sufis traced their ideas to some Quranic verses and traditions of the Prophet, to which they gave a mystic or esoteric rather than a literal interpretation. Herein lay the basis of their fundamental difference with the *ulama* as also with the rationalists. They claimed that their ideas represented the true spirit of Islam although these transcended all outward forms of religion. They lived ascetic lives. After years of travel they settled down in *khanaqahs* where their advice, blessing and free food were available for the common people.<sup>49</sup> What they aimed at was the spiritualisation of

Islam from within; conflicts in the metaphysics and ethics of formal religion were sought to be resolved through their own intuition, not through reasoned argument.<sup>50</sup>

In later Sufism we notice theosophical and pantheistic elements developing from non-Islamic influences of diverse kinds. It provided scope for an endless variety of emotional approaches to man's relation with God. By the eleventh century the Sufis were divided into twelve groups. On the whole, there was continuous development of sufism; wealth of ideas and intensity of emotion raised it far above orthodoxy and rigidity. According to Browne, the mystical and pantheistic thought of Persia found its 'most complete and vivid expression' in the poetry of Jami who was born 55 years before Guru Nanak.

The following is a simplified account of the spiritual journey prescribed by Sufism :

Sufism is the description of the adventures of a soul. It speaks of the seeker after God as a *Salik*, or a "traveller", and of the progress in the spiritual life as a "*Suluk*", a "travel" or "journey", along which he is guided by a *Murshid* or *Pir*, a "guide" or an "elder", who has already attained the goal by completing the journey, and is thus qualified to lead a seeker, now his *Murid*, an "aspirant", to the attainment of *Ma'rifat*, the "knowledge" of God. The traveller is guided along the course of *at-Tariqat*, the "path", the practices which are prescribed by the *Murshid*, the guide, according to the progress made by the devotee. He, passing through the *Maqamat*, the "stages", experiences certain *Ahwal*, the "states", and finally if he perseveres to the end, he attains by *Fadl*, the grace of God, the desired goal of union with God, called *fana fi'l-haqiqat*, "annihilation of reality."<sup>51</sup>

Union with God through loving devotion to Him is the essence of the Sufi faith. It has its own practices, of which the rejection of religious rituals of the orthodox type is a necessary corollary. Even the adoption of un-Islamic Practices was not forbidden if these were considered likely to be helpful as spiritual exercises. Singing (*qavali*) and dancing (*sama*) were regarded as methods of inducing a state of ecstasy which brought the *Salik* nearer to his goal of union with God. Naturally such methods were not approved by the

*ulama.*

If union with God was the source of infinite bliss, it followed that separation from Him meant infinite anguish.

By Thy Truth, if Thou wouldst sell me Paradise in exchange for a single moment of my ecstasy or for one passing gleam of the least of my spiritual states, I would not buy it ! And if Thou wert to set Hell-fire before me, with all the diverse kinds of torment that are contained therein, I would deem it of no account in comparison with my suffering when Thou hidest Thyself from me.<sup>52</sup>

Sufism gained a foothold in the Punjab soon after the province came under Ghaznavid rule. It was in Lahore that Ali b. Usman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, a native of Ghazni, wrote his monumental treatise on mysticism entitled *Kashful Mahjub*. Not only his contemporaries but also later Sufis derived knowledge and inspiration from his *magnum opus*. He died towards the close of the eleventh century in Lahore. His reputation for generosity made him known as *Data Ganj Bakhsh*. His reputation survived till the nineteenth century. His influence outside the Muslim society was indicated by the fact that his mausoleum was rebuilt by Ranjit Singh and Rani Chand Kaur.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries Lahore and Multan attracted many well-known Sufis from countries outside India. Baha-ud-din Zakariya, who founded the Suhrawardi order in India, settled in Multan and died in 1262. He was held in high esteem by Iltutmish. The celebrated Persian poet Sadi (1184-1291) was probably invited by Balban's eldest son, Muhammad Khan, to come over to India and to adorn his court at Multan. The poet, however, refused, on grounds of health, to leave his beloved Shiraz; but he sent the Indian prince a copy of a selection of his verse in his own handwriting.<sup>53</sup> Another tradition tells us that he actually visited the Punjab and Gujarat.<sup>54</sup>

From the thirteenth century onwards two Sufi orders—the Chishtis and the Suhrawardis—exercised considerable influence on religious thought and literary activity, particularly in north-western India. Khwaja Muin-ud-din Hasan came to India towards the close of the twelfth century, spent some years in Lahore and Delhi, and



then settled at Ajmer, where he died in 1236. Nizam-ud-din Auliya (died 1325), the great saint of Delhi, belonged to the Chishti order. In the Punjab Shaikh Farid Shakarganj (died 1265) of the Chishti order made Pak Pattan a well-known centre of Sufism. Baha-ud-din Zakariya established the influence of the Suhrawardi order in Sind and parts of the Punjab; its principal centre was at Uch. Later, in the fifteenth century, the Shattari and Qadiri orders were established in India. The founder of the Shattari order in this country was Shah Abdullah Shattari who settled at Mandu, the capital of Malwa, and died in 1485. The Shattari Sufis studied Vedanta and Practised difficult ascetic exercises like the Jogis. The early centres of the Qadiri order were in Multan and Uch; subsequently the Qadiris established themselves in Lahore. Owing to the geographical proximity of the Punjab to the Islamic countries which were the homeland of Sufism this province became the chief centre of Sufi activities in India. Lahore and Multan playing the most prominent role in this regard.

After its migration to India Sufism could not long remain free from environment influence. Vedanta and the survivals of Buddhism in Afghanistan and north-western India had some ideas to offer.<sup>55</sup> The philosophy and practices of the Jogis affected the Sufis, particularly the Chishtis at Pak Pattan.<sup>56</sup> The music of the Sufis could not escape the influence of Hindu music which had been partly soaked by the *bhakti* cult. So far as spiritual terminology was concerned the Sufis made liberal use of the local dialects which to some extent created common ground between them and the Indian religious reformers.

How far did sufism contribute to the spread of Islam in India? The usual view, as expressed by Khushwant Singh, is as follows :

The most significant aspect of Sufism, and one which had the greatest impact on the people, was the way of life adopted by the Sufi leaders and their immediate disciples. Where as the Muslim conquerors had tried to destroy non-believers and their places of worship, the Sufis welcomed them into their homes and embraced them as brothers..... The Sufis did not need

to do very much more to win over large number of converts. Most of the proselytes were from the lower classes who had been denied equal rights by the upper-caste Hindus..... Hindu untouchables accepting Islam no longer remained pariahs. They were given titles of honour like *Saikh*, *Malik*, *Khalifa* or *Mu'min*, and, at least in the earlier stage, enjoyed equal social privileges and intermarried with the most aristocratic of Muslim families.<sup>57</sup>

This appears to be a somewhat exaggerated assessment of the role of Sufism as a proselytizing force, based more on later legends than on contemporary evidence. Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti and his disciples probably took little interest in converting the Hindus to Islam. According to Barani, Muslims formed the bulk of the visitors who came to seek the blessing of Nizam-ud-din Auliya. That saint is reported to have said that the company of the righteous rather than preaching would change the heart of non-believers. In the fifteenth century some leading Chishtis changed their attitude and engaged in theological debates with a view to establishing the superiority of Islam.<sup>58</sup> How far they succeeded in attracting Hindus—particularly of the lower classes—is a subject which awaits further investigation. A study of Guru Nanak's compositions does not give us the impression that Islam either in its orthodox or in its Sufistic form was making any appreciable inroad into Hindu society in terms of actual conversion in his days. The philosophical tenets of Sufism were beyond the comprehension of the common man. Its literary heritage, garbed in a foreign tongue (Persian), had little attraction for the illiterate Hindu masses. The impressions derived by Hindu visitors at *khanaqahs* and passing admiration for roving Sufi mendicants could hardly bring about large-scale conversion. It may be noted in passing that the Muslim historians of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—Minhaj-i-Siraj, Barani and Afif, for instance—are far less eloquent about the Sufi saints than sixteenth-century writers like Badauni, Nizam-ud-din, and Abul Fazl.

Sufism was weakened by differences among its several orders. These differences covered secular activities as also religious practices. "Thus the Suhrawardis accepted administrative posts and accumulated wealth, while the Chishtis led strictly ascetic lives.

Music was an integral part of Chishti discipline; the Suhrawardis rejected it. The Chishtis allowed their disciples to perform *sajda* (prostration) before their *pirs*; the Suhrawardis forbade it.<sup>59</sup> Another element contributing to the weakness of Sufism was the hostility of the *ulama* who did not hesitate to use their political influence against what they considered to be un-Islamic practices such as asceticism, music, and dancing. The Sufis, in their turn, were loud in their protest against the worldly life of the *ulama* who used their learning for accumulating wealth and extending political and social influence and whose prayers, fasts, and pilgrimages meant little more than mechanical conformity with conventional rituals. But the conflict between Sufism and orthodoxy did not assume serious proportions because the Chishti and Suhrawardi orders accepted the orthodox theology as also the *Shariat* for all practical purposes. The Suhrawardis were more conservative in this respect; they realised—to a greater extent than the Chishtis—that orthodoxy was the indispensable instrument of unity for the numerically weak Muslim community in India. In a country with an overwhelming majority of non-Muslim population Sufism had to make such adjustments with the political and social needs of Muslim State and the Muslim society as it was not called upon to make in Muslim countries like Persia.

Some eminent Sufis of this period, belonging to the Punjab and its neighbourhood, made important contributions to Sufi thought.<sup>60</sup> Despite such concessions to the socio-political needs of Islam in India, and absorption of Hindu ideas and practices referred to above, Sufism in north-western India was neither a negligible spiritual force nor a debased form of Persian Sufism. It had acquired some distinctive characteristic of its own without losing the original spiritual and poetic flavour. McLeod, however, tells us that "the Punjabi Sufism of Guru Nanak's period had evidently departed radically from the classical pattern of Arab and Persian Sufism. Guru Nanak himself indicates this condition in references which place Sufis under the same condemnation as the conventional qazis and mullahs."<sup>61</sup> He also speaks of 'the blend of modified orthodoxy and debased Sufism which was dominant in the Muslim community of the Punjab

during this period'. But the condemnatory passages in the *Adi Granth* referred to by him<sup>62</sup> need not be interpreted as a *general* condemnation of all Sufis. Certainly there were black sheep among the Sufis who deserved the Guru's condemnation. One of the great Sufis, Shaikh Farid, condemns them :

Farid men carry prayer—carpets on their shoulders, wear a Sufi's *robe*, and speak sweetly, but there are knives in their hearts. Externally they appear bright, but in their hearts is sable night.<sup>63</sup>

Among the Sufis whom Guru Nanak met there must have been some who effaced themselves, made truth and contentment their holy creed, and so deserved to go to Paradise.<sup>64</sup> His meeting with Shaikh Brahm at Pak Pattan<sup>65</sup> might be recalled in this connection. Certainly all Sufis did not carry 'knives in their hearts'.

References have been made above to Buddhist influence on Sufism. This influence was probably derived from *Mahayana* sources surviving in Afghanistan and Central Asia. In north-western India Buddhism was no longer a living religion; whatever traces of Buddhist ideas and practices survived in a debased form were to be found among the Jogis. There are occasional references to the Buddha in Guru Nanak's hymns—in the *Japji*, for example—and he visited Gaya, where the Buddha had attained *Nirvana*, in course of his travels in the east. It has been suggested that the Buddha is regarded in the *Adi Granth* as an incarnation of Vishnu.<sup>66</sup> In this connection it is interesting to remember the Hindu tradition relating to the ten incarnations (*avatars*) of Vishnu; the Buddha was one of them. Here we have an interesting instance of absorption of Buddhism by Hinduism.

Jainism had not shared the fate of Buddhism. It was a living faith in Rajputana and Gujarat, and from Guru Nanak's sharp criticism of Jain monks (probably of the *Digambara* sect) in *Var Majh*<sup>67</sup> it would appear that they were not unfamiliar figures in the Punjab. He condemns their unclean habits :

They have their hair plucked out, they drink  
dirty water, they beg and eat others' leavings;  
They spread out their ordure they inhale its

smell, they are shy to look at water;

\* \* \* \*

They are ever filthy day and night; they have  
no sacrificial marks on their foreheads.

\* \* \* \*

God hath ruined them; they go about despised;  
their words are like curses.

The Guru condemns the Jain practice of *ahimsa* : he does not recognise man's responsibility for killing animals, for the role of destroyer belongs to God alone.

God killeth and restoreth animals to life;  
none else may preserve them.

Although the Jains do not believe in God they conform in many ways to Hindu customs. But there are inconsistencies in this conformity, as the Guru points out :

They give not their *deceased* relations lamps or  
perform their last rites, or place anywhere  
barley rolls and leaves *for them*.

The sixty-eight places of pilgrimage grant  
them no access; the Brahmans will not eat their food.

There is no reference to the philosophical basis of Buddhism and Jainism in Guru Nanak's compositions. But he refers to the six systems of Hindu philosophy :

Six the systems, six their teachers,  
And six their different teachings;  
The Lord of them all is the One Lord  
However various his aspects are.<sup>68</sup>

The six systems are *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyaya*, *Vaisesika*, *Purva Mimansa*, *Uttara Mimansa* or *Vedanta*. The names of the six teachers are : Kapila, Patanjali, Gautama, Kanada, Jaimini, Vyasa. It is pretty certain that none of these systems exercised any active influence on the Hindu society in general in the Punjab in Guru Nanak's days; they provided material for theoretical discourses in which learned Brahmans took some interest, less with a view to seeking spiritual enlightenment than as a technique for display of learning. Guru Nanak had no interest in barren controversies; he concludes his reference to 'six different teachings' with his usual emphasis on the unity of God which transcends all philosophical

differences and doctrinal disputes.

The traditional founder of the *Yoga* system of Philosophy is Patanjali. The teachings of Patanjali constitute 'a manual of psychological ethics intended for developing the powers of the mind with the ultimate object of seeing through the futility of exercising them in spiritual interest'.<sup>69</sup> The discipline prescribed for developing the powers of the mind consists of eight steps : *Yama* (self-restraint), *asana* (posture), *pranayama* (regulation of breath), *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses), *dharana* (steadiness of mind) and *samadhi* (spiritual trance). The exercises are physical in form but spiritual in purpose. Later on the physical aspect received greater emphasis and a new form of *Yoga* was developed under the name of *Hathayoga*. Those who practised *Hathayoga* as a means to spiritual progress came to be known as Yogis or Jogis. They occupied a more or less prominent place in the religious life of north-western India in the days of Guru Nanak. We have an indirect reference to *Hathayoga* in the following hymn :

I have locked up the ten gates of my body,  
And I sit in contemplation in its sixty-eight chambers.

.....        .....

Putting on a loin-cloth I dwell alone  
And drink from the waterfall of the brain.<sup>70</sup>

Certain terms used in connection with the Jogis, to whom we have many references in the *Adi Granth*, require explanation. The religious order to which the Jogis belonged was known by different names : *Gorakhanthi* (followers of the path prescribed by Gorakhnath), *Nath*<sup>71</sup> and *Kanphata* ('spliteared').<sup>72</sup> The literal meaning of the word *Nath* is 'master'. The Jogis regarded Siva as *Adinath* or 'Original Master'. There were also nine human *Naths*,<sup>73</sup> great Jogis like Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath who had attained immortality and become objects of worship. The term *Kanphata* had reference to the Jogis' practice of splitting their ears which tradition traced to Gorakhnath. Guru Nanak refers to this practice in the following hymn which gives us a graphic picture of a Jogi's dress :

Religion consisteth not in a patched coat, or in a Jogi's staff, or  
in ashes smeared over the body;

Religion consisteth not in earrings worn, or a shaven head, or in the blowing of horns.<sup>74</sup>

The word *kanphata* probably came to be used by Muslims as a term of disrespect, but the practice of splitting the ears had acquired a recognised spiritual significance among the Jogis. A novice who had not reached the stage of having his ears split was known as *Aughar*. A *Siddha* or *Sidh* was a Jogi who had attained the stage of perfection, or a semi-divine stage, through the practice of Jog. According to Macauliffe, they 'are persons who by the practice of Jog are popularly supposed to acquire extended life and miraculous powers'. Traditionally their number was 84. Different lists of 84 *Sidhs* are found in Buddhist as also in non-Buddhist literature. Persons aspiring to be *Sidhs* were called *Sadhik* ('striver').<sup>75</sup> Usually the Jogis used the sacred thread, but one who had attained extraordinary spiritual eminence might discard the sacred thread as also ear-rings.

A secular Jogi was called a *Rawal*. He earned his living by begging, fortune-telling, singing and similar practices. Such practice—even worse practices—have been adopted by some sections of the Gorakhpantis in modern times on a large scale.

They make charms for themselves, and some sell them to others; they pronounce spells and practise palmistry and juggling, tell fortunes, and interpret dreams; they sell a woollen amulet to protect children from the evil eye; and they pretend to cure disease, muttering texts over the sick, and practising medicine and exorcism, and vending drugs.... Some are reputed to have transmuted base metals into gold or silver. There is legend of such transmutation in the times of Altamsh. Others, for fraud, impersonate members of families on pilgrimages. Still others resort to gambling and swindling and the three card games. Some are said to be able to control hail storms.<sup>76</sup>

Begging Jogis were probably not an unfamiliar sight in Guru Nanak's days. He says :

*The Jogi* runneth about begging for clothes and food; He burneth with the pangs of hunger, and he shall also have misery hereafter.<sup>77</sup>

The Guru reminds the Jogi that he is sacrificing his spiritual objective for his earthly needs :

O Jogi, thou buildest a hut and preachest to the world :  
 If, abandoning thy devotional attitudes,  
*thou beg from door to door*, how shalt thou  
 obtain the True One?<sup>78</sup>

In the *Japji* (xxviii) Guru Nanak says :

Make association with men thine Ai Panth.....<sup>79</sup>

Macauliffe simply calls the Aipanth 'a sect of Jogis'. Khushwant Singh describes it as 'religious order now defunct, but apparently held in great estimation in the life-time of the Guru'. He, however, 'failed to find anything which would throw light on this sect in any of the translations or commentaries'.<sup>80</sup> But some facts about the Aipantis are available in historical literature and local traditions. They still have their centre at Hardwar.

The Aipantis are Jogis of the Gorakhpanti order. They trace the origin of their sect of a female disciple of Gorakhnath named Bimla Devi who was called *Mai*, corrupted into *Ai*. The pre-eminence assigned to the Mother Goddess is evidently an indication of strong Tantric influence. The Punjab was probably the principal area of Aipanti activities. Narmaji, one of their early teachers, was born at Khot in the former Jind State and founded a monastery at Bohar in Rohtak. The Aipanth was recognised as one of the twelve *panths* of the *Kanphatas*. It is mentioned in the *Dabistan*.<sup>81</sup>

Alberuni refers to the practices of *Yoga*.<sup>82</sup> According to the *Dabistan*, the Jogis

.....know no prohibited food. ....They also kill and eat men.....There are some of this sect who having mixed their excretions and filtered them through a piece of cloth, drink them, and say that such an act renders a man capable of great affairs, and they pretend to know strange things..... They have all originated from Gorakhnath. The author of this work saw a man, who singing the customary song, sat upon a corpse, which he kept unburied until it came into a state of dissolution, and then ate the flesh of it; this act they hold extremely meritorious.<sup>83</sup>

Apparently the author was speaking of the practices of a particular section of Tantric Jogis. Briggs says :

The Tantric element is prominent in the teaching of the Gorakhnathis. Both the Buddhist and the Saivite Tantras have had their influence upon the beliefs and practices of the sect.



In spite of strong Tantric influence the Jogis were primarily devotees of Siva in the *Bhairaba* form, representing the most terrible aspect of Siva. Some attention was also paid to Vishnu. The name Gorakhnath was sometimes attributed to Siva. By a connected process of thinking Gorakhnath was regarded as a manifestation of Siva and even worshipped in some Saivite temples. In general the Jogis worshipped the many gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. In addition, they worshipped 9 *Naths* and 84 *Sidhs* living in the holy Himalayas.<sup>84</sup>

Although formally open only to the twice-born, the *Kanphata* order admitted not only Sudras and low-caste recruits but also Muslims. Caste restrictions were not observed in respect of inter-dining among the Hindu Jogis, but Hindu and Muslim Jogis took their food separately. This relaxation of caste rules might have been due to the influence of *bhakti* cult. The dead were buried. Two principal vows had to be taken : to live by begging and to maintain celibacy.<sup>85</sup> The latter vow was not scrupulously kept. Guru Nanak says :

Jogis with long hair and ashes *on their bodies* keep wives.  
Children scream before and behind them.<sup>86</sup>

Addressing a Jogi the Guru condemns his gross deviation from ascetic practices :

Thou dost not restrain thy seed, and yet thou callest  
thyself continent,  
While saying 'Mother', thou beggest and fallest  
in love with woman.<sup>87</sup>

A monastery at Tilla,<sup>88</sup> on the Salt Range, in the Jhelum district became the principal seat of the jogis. Its antiquity is evident from the tradition that Gorakhnath frequently lived there. There were important centres at Sialkot and Sultanpur.<sup>89</sup> In Amritsar there is a temple of Bhairon (Bhairaba) at Durgiana, which is the meeting place for the twelve *panths* into which the *Kanphata* order is divided.<sup>90</sup> The location of these centres shows that the Jogis were largely concentrated in the Punjab. The *Naths* and the *Sidhs* were traditionally supposed to be living in the holy Himalayas, but no particular place is named. Mention should be made in this connection of Nanakmata, north-west of Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh. It was

formerly a centre of the Jogis and was known as Gorakhmata. The name was changed in memory of Guru Nanak's visit to the place.<sup>91</sup>

The frequency of references to Jogis in the *Adi Granth*, particularly the importance assigned to them in the *Sidh Gosht*, shows, as Briggs rightly argues, 'familiarity with a well-established and well known order, and not a sect in the early process of its development'.<sup>92</sup> The founder of the order, Gorakhnath, flourished according to Grierson in the fifteenth century. But the order appears to have consolidated and extended its influence to such an extent in the days of Guru Nanak that its founder could hardly have been his contemporary. The Guru says :

At God's gate there dwell.....

Thousands upon thousands of Gorakh.....<sup>93</sup>

Briggs holds the view that Gorakhnath lived not later than 1200, probably early in the eleventh century; it is not quite unlikely that he lived even earlier.<sup>94</sup> Although there are many legends about him he appears to have been a historical figure.

Tradition ascribes to Gorakhnath systematisation of creed and organisation of sect, but the Jog system was apparently quite old and diverse in origin. Ibn Batuta speaks of cave-dwelling Jogis devoted to severe ascetic practices and possessed of miraculous powers: References to *Kapalikas* in the well known Sanskrit dramas *Prabodhachandrodaya* and *Karpuramanjari* have been connected with the development of the Jog system. Ideas and practices derived from Buddhist *Siddhas* of the *Vajrayana* sect have also been referred to in this connection. What prevailed in the Punjab in Guru Nanak's days was obviously an old system comprising many elements mixed together in course of centuries.

A large number of hymns are addressed by Guru Nanak to Jogis, *Rawals and Avadhutas* and several names are mentioned : Gorakhnath, Gopichand, Machindra, Bharthri, Charpat, Lohari Pa. From these hymns it is possible to form some idea of the ideas and practices of the Jogis. Guru Nanak seems to have attached some importance to them because they exercised considerable influence on the common people who were naturally impressed by their display

of supernatural powers. He felt it necessary to expose the hollowness of their doctrines and the futility of miracles in the world of religion. To what extent they were really won over by the Guru cannot be determined, but his constant condemnation of miracles probably made some impression on the popular mind.

The teaching of Guru Nanak and the doctrines of the Jogis<sup>95</sup> have certain common features. In both systems there is a complete rejection of the Brahminical social order based on castes as also of rites and rituals which are peculiarly Brahminical in character. Control over the mind and inner spiritual experience are emphasized in both. But the differences are fundamental. Guru Nanak rejects the individualistic approach of the Jogis towards the problems of life, their asceticism and condemnation of women. Gorakhnath is said to have described women as 'tigresses' who are 'in continual search of beautiful men whom they eat'. Guru Nanak's thought, as we have seen, runs on entirely different lines.

The dialogue known as *Sidh Gosh*<sup>96</sup> took place between Guru Nanak and a group of Jogis most probably at Achal Batala, as Bhai Gurdas says, or at Gorakh Hatri, as the *Puratan Janam-sakhi* tells us. Here we have 23 questions and answers which reveal much of the merits and demerits of the Jog system in the early sixteenth century. Charpat Jogi raises the issue which is fundamental to all religions :

They say the world is like a turbulent sea,  
A sea which no one can swim over.  
How then can we find the other shore?

Guru Nanak replies :

As the lotus in the water is not wet  
Nor the water-fowl sporting in a stream  
Fix your mind on the guru's words and thus,  
Says Nanak, cross the world's sea to your Lord Supreme.

The mind is restless, says the Guru, but

It is brought to rest by the anchor of the Name  
Then does it find its true abode and resting-place  
The Creator unites it with Himself and thus  
Is conceived love for the truth (by His grace).

This brief survey shows that religious life in the Punjab in the

days of Guru Nanak did not lack in variety and even richness. Perhaps in no other Province of India there was so much scope for intermingling of religious ideas and practices. But all faiths appear to have been seized by a moral paralysis which crippled man's pursuit of Truth. One might recall the gloomy picture of the wickedness of the world at the rise of the Sikh religion drawn by Bhai Gurdas.<sup>97</sup> But nothing can excel the directness and poignancy of Guru Nanak's own words :

There are many dogmas, there are many systems,  
There are many scriptural revelations,  
Many modes to fetter the mind :  
But the saint seeks for release through Truth;  
Truth is higher than all these, and higher  
Still is the life lived in Truth.<sup>98</sup>

But Truth was nowhere to be found :

In the dark night of falsehood,  
I espy not the moon of Truth anywhere;  
I grope after Truth and am bewildered.  
I see no path in the darkness;  
It is the obstinacy with which Man  
Clings to his petty self-hood  
That causeth this anguish;  
Nanak asketh : where is the path of salvation?<sup>99</sup>

In such a situation God sends a saviour :

When the world is in distress it heartily prayeth  
The True One attentively listeneth and with His kind  
disposition granteth consolation.  
He giveth orders to the cloud and the rain falleth in  
torrents.<sup>100</sup>

These words of Guru Amar Das remind one of the great assurance given by Lord Krishna in the *Gita*.

For whenever *Dharma* (Religion or Law) fails and  
*Adharma* (Irreligion or Lawlessness) uprises, then do  
I bring myself to bodied birth. To guard the  
righteous, to destroy evil-doers, to establish *Dharma*,  
I come into birth age after age.<sup>101</sup>

Under orders of God the rain fell in torrents. Light was transmitted from God to Guru Nanak. "Hearing (mankind's) cry the Beneficent Lord sent Guru Nanak into the world", says Bhai Gurdas.

What followed is best described in the words of Bhai Gurdas :

(When) Satguru Nanak appeared darkness was dispelled and  
light shone forth over the world!

As when the sun rises the stars are hidden and darkness flees  
away;

As at the lion's roar a herd of deer takes instant flight.<sup>102</sup>

CHAPTER IV  
LIFE OF GURU NANAK

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Malcolm, the first European historian of the Sikhs, writing in 1812, pointed out the basic difficulty in respect of the reconstruction of biographies of the Gurus.

There is no part of oriental biography in which it is more difficult to separate truth from falsehood, than that which relates to the history of religious impostors. The account of their lives is generally recorded by devoted disciples and warm adherents, or by violent enemies and bigoted persecutors. The former, from enthusiastic admiration, decorate them with every quality and accomplishment that can adorn men : the latter misrepresent their characters and detract from all their merits and pretensions. This general remark I have found to apply with peculiar force to the varying accounts given, by Sikh and Muhammadan authors, of Nanak and his successors.<sup>1</sup>

The earliest account of Guru Nanak's life written by a Muslim is to be found in the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*.<sup>2</sup> It is by no means a satisfactory account, but its author was liberal-minded and a friend of the sixth Guru, and he does not 'misrepresent' Guru Nanak's character from sectarian motives. The real problem is to assess the historical value of traditional accounts of the Guru's life which are infected by the 'enthusiastic admiration' of his 'adherents'. This 'general remark' applies 'with peculiar force' to the *Janam-sakhis* which constitute our most elaborate source of information on the subject.

More than forty years ago a historian of the Sikhs lamented that his position was a 'desperate' one in respect of the reconstruction of a biography of Guru Nanak because there was 'hardly any material for a satisfactory biography on critical lines'. He continued :

Indeed, when the attempt is made 'to get rid of the fable mixed up with the Sikh legends, and to work the residue of fact into some sort of historical order', difficulties crop up at almost every step.<sup>3</sup>

Later writers have reiterated the view that the available sources of information regarding the life of Guru Nanak are, on the whole, inadequate and unreliable.<sup>4</sup> The writers of the *janam-sakhis* sometimes narrate legends and describe miracles which are unacceptable from a historian's point of view. It has been said that these writers, 'instead of drawing upon their own imagination for new stories, have borrowed the idea and details of some of them from Buddhist, Jewish and Muslim sources with modifications to suit the particular events they were narrating'.<sup>5</sup> This process of mixing up facts and legends began in the seventeenth century and clouded to some extent the true image of Guru Nanak.

The difficulty of isolating facts from legends is largely responsible for confusing approaches such as the following :

.....there have been two *Nanaks*, the factual and the 'formless'.....  
 He was an historical person; he is also a theological construction. He is what India and the world in general think he is; he is also what Sikhs think of him—he is historico-theological to them, a real person and also a creature of religious fancy. And yet the two *Nanaks* are not always to be distinguished from each other. They are two in one, both in practice and in theory.<sup>6</sup>

Echoing this elaborate differentiation a recent British biographer of Guru Nanak says :

We are engaged in a quest for the historical Nanak, for there is a Nanak of both legend and faith as well as a Nanak of history.<sup>7</sup>

There is however, really no scope for such dichotomy in our study of Guru Nanak's career and personality. In him history and theology—the world of mortals and the world of immortals—found complete and harmonious integration. 'Religious fancy' or 'legend and faith' did sometimes play a part in creating an image of the Guru which was partly unreal, but discerning Sikhs interpreted him in the light of his own teachings and in the perspective of the development of their faith. He was not deified; his image was not

placed in temples to be worshipped. The history of Sikhism was not affected by a process analogous to the rise of the *Mahayana* cult within the Buddhist church. Guru Gobind Singh saw in the founder of the faith a human teacher of mankind.

He bestowed peace upon all Sikhs and protected them in all places.

He established this [Sikh] *dharma* in the Kali [-age]; and showed the Way to all good people.<sup>8</sup>

This is the authentic Sikh tradition about the first Guru. It leaves no scope for differentiation between 'what India and the world in general think he is' and 'what Sikhs think of him'. Guru Gobind Singh's simple tribute to the founder of the faith is specially significant because long before he wrote miraculous legends about Guru Nanak had begun to grow, as we note in the *Dabistan*. To such legends the test of historical criticism is to be applied with a view to rescuing the true image of the Guru. If confusion is sought to be created by 'religious fancy', as the *janam-sakhis* sometimes do, it is the historian's task to recover the kernel of truth from legendary anecdotes. History knows only one Guru Nanak; there is no question of a second one who is 'formless'.

Before proceeding to assess the historical value of the *janam-sakhis* it is necessary to say a few words about the *Adi Granth* and the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas in so far as they offer us some information about the Guru's life. The *Adi Granth* contains as many as 974 compositions of Guru Nanak, but references to biographical details are quite scanty. The most important historical references are to be found in the verses collectively known as *Babur-vani*. These relate to a single incident, but are helpful in respect of reconstruction of the sequence of incidents in the Guru's life as given in the *janam-sakhis*. The references to Guru Nanak in the compositions of the later Gurus (Guru Angad and Guru Arjan) and in the *savayyas* of the *bhatts* who were contemporaries of Guru Arjan are primarily eulogies. Apart from throwing light on the developing image of the founder of the faith, they are not at all important from the strictly historical point of view. The same remark applies to Guru Gobind Singh's references to Guru Nanak in the



*Dasam Granth*. This is not surprising in view of the purpose with which the hymns and the *savayyas* were composed. The Gurus and the *bhatts* were writing for seekers of religious truth and not for historical investigators.

In the *Vars*<sup>9</sup> of Bhai Gurdas we have, as Macauliffe says, 'the oldest authentic account' of Guru Nanak.<sup>10</sup> A nephew of Guru Amar Das, he was probably admitted to the Sikh *Panth* by Guru Ram Das, in 1579. After serving for several years as a missionary he was employed by Guru Arjan as his amanuensis at the time of the compilation of the *Adi Granth*. After the fifth Guru's tragic death Bhai Gurdas attached himself to Guru Hargobind. He served the cause of Sikhism for many years and died in ripe old age in 1629. His eminence in the Sikh community was testified to by the fact that Guru Hargobind himself performed his funeral rites as he had remained celibate.<sup>11</sup>

Bhai Gurdas wrote 39 *Vars*<sup>12</sup> and 556 verses in the *Kabitt* form. Macauliffe supposes that these were written 'not much more than sixty years after the demise of Guru Nanak'; but at least *Var I, 48*, which contains a reference to Guru Hargobind's military exploits, could not have been written before his first battle with Mughal troops in 1628. This need not mean that the major portion of the *Vars* was not completed earlier. It is said that while selecting the hymns for incorporation in the *Adi Granth* Guru Arjan offered to insert the compositions of Bhai Gurdas who modestly replied that they were not worthy of such honour. The Guru then said that whoever read his writings should acquire spiritual profit.<sup>13</sup> This seems to prove that portions, at least, of the *Vars* were composed before the compilation of the *Adi Granth* (1604).

Like the *bhatts* whose compositions have found place in the *Adi Granth*, Bhai Gurdas was altogether indifferent to historical details and sequence of incidents. As Macauliffe says :

Gur Das's object was essentially religious. He delighted in singing the greatness of God, the littleness of man, and the excellence of the Guru. Besides the *Vars*, Gur Das wrote *Kabits*, which contain the Sikh tenets and a panegyric of the Gurus.<sup>14</sup>

Macauliffe regrets that Bhai Gurdas 'did not write a complete life

of the Guru, as its details could at that time have been easily obtained'. Some of the Guru's contemporaries were still alive, and one of them at least—Bhai Budha—'retained the vigour of his intellectual faculties'. He had embraced Sikhism under Guru Nanak at Kartarpur and he 'used to attend him on some of his peregrinations'. This grand old man died at the ripe old age of 107 years during the pontificate of Guru Hargobind.<sup>15</sup> If Bhai Gurdas had been inclined to give a full account of Guru Nanak's life he could have easily collected authentic details from Bhai Budha. But Bhai Gurdas did not consider it necessary to give details about a great event in which he was directly concerned, *viz*; the compilation of the *Adi Granth*, and his reference to Guru Arjan's execution was brief and vague :

The Guru hath taken his abode in the river among the fish.....<sup>16</sup>

A poet who could observe such silence on the first great tragedy in the history of Sikhism—a tragedy of which he was an eye witness—was obviously uninterested in the details of the life of Guru Nanak who had died several decades ago.

Inadequacy of facts is the principal defect in the account of the life of Guru Nanak which Bhai Gurdas has left for us. He gives us a list of Guru Nanak's important adherents, but he omits the name of Rai Bular, the landlord of Talwandi, who deserves inclusion in view of his close association with the Guru. By adding sub-caste titles to the personal names of some leading Sikhs he helps us to understand the social composition of the growing Sikh community. The data given by him help us to reconstruct Guru Nanak's travel itinerary. On the whole his *Vars* are much more eulogistic than descriptive.

Despite the brevity of the concrete narrative, it has been said, "whatever reference he makes in the *Vars* must be considered authentic".<sup>17</sup> This is a recognition of the eminent position which Bhai Gurdas occupied in the Sikh community of his times as also of his opportunity of ascertaining the facts of Guru Nanak's life. But a critical historian cannot accept without scrutiny all that he says about the Guru.<sup>18</sup> Here is an account of Guru Nanak's miracle at Baghdad as described by Bhai Gurdas :

(Baba Nanak) took the pir's son and closing his eyes he

ascended (with him) into the air.

In the twinkling of an eye he revealed all of the lakhs of heavens and lakhs of underworlds.

Filling (his) begging-bowl with *prasad* from a *karahi* he brought it from the nether regions.

A manifest authority is not hidden and cannot be hidden.<sup>19</sup>

Such manifestation of 'authority' is inconsistent with Guru Nanak's own teachings. Bhai Gurdas himself attributes to the Guru the following sayings :

Apart from (the miracle of) the True Name, I work no wonder.

Were I to array myself in clothes of fire, or build a dwelling of Himalayan snow;

Were I to consume iron as my food or make myself master of the whole earth;

Were I to assume immense proportions and have the whole world move at my command;

Were I to weigh earth and heaven but with a tiny copper weight in the other scale;

Were I to possess within myself such power that I could command any one as I chose;

Without the True Name (all would be but) the shadow of the cloud.<sup>20</sup>

A similar idea is expressed in the following hymn of the Guru in the *Adi Granth* :

Were I to become a Sidh and work miracles; could I command the wealth of the *universe* to come to me;

Could I disappear and appear at *pleasure*, and were the world to honour me;

May it not be that on beholding these things I may forget Thee and not remember Thy name!<sup>21</sup>

Malcolm says :

"Though his biographers have ascribed miracles to Nanac, we never find that he pretended to work any : on the contrary, he derided those who did, as deriving power from evil spirit".<sup>22</sup>

In the words of Cunningham :

The unpretending Nanak, the deplorer of human frailty and the lover of his fellow men, becomes, in the mind of Gurdas and of the Sikhs people, the first of heavenly powers and emanations, and the proclaimed instrument of God for the redemption of the world.<sup>23</sup>

In so far as the compositions of Bhai Gurdas reflect a tendency to elevate the human Guru to the position of 'the first of heavenly powers and emanations' they deserve rejection or modification from the historical point of view. But their direct meaning and indirect implications should be carefully scrutinised before they are put in the same category as the *janam-sakhis* in respect of certain seemingly miraculous incidents.<sup>24</sup>

We would now turn to the *janam-sakhis* which, in spite of their generous concession to miracles and legends, constitute our principal source of information in regard to the incidents of Guru Nanak's life. A *janam-sakhi* literally means a birth story. Each *sakhi* usually deals with a single incident. A number of *sakhis* are normally put together in chronological order, but the sequence is not always logical or well planned. There is very little literary quality in these compositions. Indeed, It has been said that they were 'written by semi-literate scribes for the benefit of an wholly illiterate people'.<sup>25</sup> We know nothing about the authors of the *janam-sakhis* in their original form, their date of composition, and the primary sources on which they were based. It is not unlikely that some at least among them passed through several hands before reaching their present form. This implies a process of change, involving addition and deletion at different stages.

Early writers on Sikh history like Trumpp and Macauliffe utilised the *janam-sakhi* attributed to Sewa Das. It had two versions : one found in the India Office Library and known as *Vilayat Vali Janam-sakhi*,<sup>26</sup> the other found at Hafizabad and known as *Hafizabad Vali Janam-sakhi*.<sup>27</sup> Trumpp concluded, on the basis of 'all external and internal marks', that the *Vilayat Vali Janam-sakhi* was composed in the latter part of Guru Arjan's, or the beginning of Guru Hargobind's pontificate. It enabled him, he thought, 'to distinguish the older tradition regarding Nanak from the later one, and to fix, with some degree of verisimilitude the real facts of his life'.<sup>28</sup> But Macauliffe assigned the composition of what he called the *janam-sakhi* of Sewa Das to the year 1588 on the basis of one of its copies bearing the date *Sambat* 1645. In his view it was 'beyond dispute the most trustworthy detailed record we possess of

the life of Guru Nanak'.

It contains much less mythological matter than any other Gurumukhi life of the Guru, and is a much more rational, consistent, and satisfactory narrative.<sup>29</sup>

It is not unlikely that both Trumpp and Macauliffe were in error in regard to the dates assigned by them. The *Vilayat Vali* version is said to contain internal evidence pointing to 1635 as the date of original composition.<sup>30</sup> It is possible that the *Janam-sakhi* was composed during the pontificate of Guru Hargobind and was contemporaneous with the compositions of Bhai Gurdas. A later date of composition would naturally affect its authenticity; but the uncertainty about the authorship<sup>31</sup> would hardly be a material factor in the assessment of its historical value. Even if Sewa Das was the name of the original writer, we know nothing about his credentials.

The *Vilayat Vali* and *Hafizabad Vali* versions represent a single work of which the original version is lost. For the sake of convenience the two together may be called *Puratan Janamsakhi*; there are differences between them, but these are rarely material.<sup>32</sup>

Before the discovery of the *Vilayat Vali* and *Hafizabad Vali* manuscripts in the late nineteenth century the ground was held by the *janam-sakhi* attributed to Bhai Bala. These formed the basis of Santokh Singh's *Gur Nanak Prakas* which was completed in 1823. Even the appearance of the *Puratan janam-sakhi* could not completely dislodge them; some details drawn from them continued to be used by writers on Guru Nanak's life.

Bhai Bala is represented as a younger contemporary of Guru Nanak and his companion in his wanderings. He is said to have composed a *janam-sakhi* by order of Guru Angad. Both Trumpp and Macauliffe pointed out the incongruities in this story.<sup>33</sup> Linguistic evidence is against the authenticity of the work. Written in the current Punjabi dialect with a slight admixture of archaic words, it is far away from the dialect in which Guru Angad's hymns in the *Adi Granth* are composed. Again, it appears from the current versions of the *janam-sakhi* that Bala was a stranger to Guru Angad. It is quite unlikely that the second Guru, who was closely associated with Guru Nanak, in his last years, did not know a person who

claimed to be the latter's companion. There are other grounds of suspicion. Bala's name does not occur in the list of Guru Nanak's prominent disciples left by Bhai Gurdas. Some hymns of the fifth Guru, as also some expressions which gained currency during the time of the tenth Guru, occur in the *janam-sakhis*. There is some evidence that Bhai Bala was a real person and had some association with Guru Nanak at Talwandi, but the story of his travels with the Guru is unsupported by independent evidence.<sup>34</sup> In any case there is no doubt that the *janam-sakhis* associated with his name are very late compositions; probably it would not be wrong to assign them to the early part of the eighteenth century.<sup>35</sup> It is possible that this 'fascinating collection' of fables represents a Hindali or Niranjani version of the life of Guru Nanak.<sup>36</sup>

Those who studied Sikh historical literature were aware of the existence of a *janam-sakhi* attributed to Miharban, who was closely associated with the Mina sect.<sup>37</sup> The founder of this sect was his father, Prithi Chand, the eldest son of Guru Ram Das; he was superseded on the issue of succession to the Guruship by his younger brother, Arjan. This supersession led to long and continuous hostility between Prithi Chand and his followers on the one hand and Guru Arjan and his successors on the other. This hostility was supposed to have been reflected in Miharban's account of the life of Guru Nanak, and for this reason scholars working in the field of Sikh history did not take much interest in it. In Miharban's *janam-sakhi* says Macauliffe, his father was 'glorified' and "there was ample opportunity for the manipulation of details".<sup>38</sup> Moreover, no copy of any substantial portion of Miharban's work was available till 1940 when the first three *pothis*, or volumes, of the six in which it was divided, were discovered.<sup>39</sup> Only the first *pothi* is attributed to Miharban himself; only in this part do we get some details relating to Guru Nanak's life. McLeod says :

An examination of it indicates that Miharban has been largely misjudged. It is true that certain features of the *janam-sakhi* could give offence, but such features are by no means as conspicuous as the *janam-sakhi's* reputation would suggest. The tone, far from being one of denigration, is manifestly one

of enthusiastic homage and places this *janam-sakhi* firmly with in the same hagiographic category as the other *janam-sakhis*.<sup>40</sup>

Apparently the hostility of the Minas did not extend to the founder of Sikhism. There is another *janam-sakhi*, attributed to Bhai Mani Singh, a well known Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh's time, which is known as *Gyan Ratnavali*. Bhai Mani Singh is reported to have used *Var I* of Bhai Gurdas as the basis of his narrative. The extant version was certainly composed after the tenth Guru's time, for its language is comparatively modern. It is a heterogeneous collection, including large borrowings from the Bala *janam-sakhis*. In its present form this work has little independent value of its own.

There are two works entitled *Mahima Prakas*. The first is in prose (*Varatak*) and was written by Bawa Singh Bhalla in 1741. The second, a larger work in verse (*Kabita*), was written by Sarup Das Bhalla in 1776. Neither work deals exclusively with Guru Nanak; both deal with the lives of his successors as well. Composed more than two centuries after Guru Nanak's death, these works cannot be accepted as primary sources for his biography. But the tradition incorporated in them

.....warrants attention as an important link in the *janam-sakhi* chain. Through the development of the *janam-sakhis* there can be traced corresponding development in the Sikh understanding of the mission of Guru Nanak and the Sikh understanding of the nature of the Sikh *panth*. Within this continuing process of the *Mahima Prakas* tradition commands its own distinctively eighteenth century importance.<sup>41</sup>

It is hardly necessary to emphasize the inadequacy of the *janam-sakhis* as historical sources for a full biography of Guru Nanak. There are stories of miracles which are inconsistent with the Guru's teaching. There are references to, or descriptions of, incidents which appear to be wholly or partly improbable from the modern point of view. Confusion regarding chronology, sequence of events and geography is a common characteristic. Apart from these positive defects there are negative defects too : the information supplied by the *janam-sakhis* is largely incomplete, and details which a biographer would eagerly seek are lacking. Yet full utilisation of these unsatisfactory traditional records is indispensable, primarily

because alternative or even supplementary material is practically not available, and secondarily because they represent the Sikh point of view which is essential to the understanding of the development of the Sikh Panth.

While using the *janam-sakhis* a critical historian must be cautious at every step, but caution should not be carried too far in pursuit of rigid preconceptions about probability. McLeod has enunciated as many as seven criteria for use in scrutinising the *janam-sakhis*.<sup>42</sup> He advocates a 'strict, at time ruthless, approach.... in a quest for the historical Nanak as it has been required in the quest of the historical Jesus'.

One would naturally agree that whatever is 'miraculous or plainly fantastic' should be rejected; but there need be no wholesale rejection in all cases, for a part of the story might be based on fact or intended to illustrate moral or spiritual teaching. The authors of the *janam-sakhis* were not learned men capable of writing in precise language about incidents figuring in family or social tradition. Moreover, they belonged to a credulous age in which stories containing a kernel of truth acquired interesting embellishments at different stages in response to popular fancy. Historical scholarship should take due note of their psychology and environment so as to extract as much credible material as possible from a heterogeneous collection of details which appeared interesting to them as also to their readers. The quest for truth need not predispose us in favour of rejection of everything which confuses or repels the modern mind at first sight.

Verification through comparison with external sources is a very useful technique, but it cannot go far if the external sources are scanty. In the case of Guru Nanak's biography the external sources consist practically of a few references in the *Adi Granth* and of epigraphic evidence from Baghdad. Contemporary historical chronicles written by Muslim authors do not help us at all; their authors took no interest in Sikhism because it had not yet acquired political importance. But the current scarcity of external sources need not be taken as final. Authentic evidence relating to Guru Nanak's travels in Orissa and Ceylon has been discovered in recent



years. It is not unlikely that fresh material bearing upon his career and teachings will be found in India, Ceylon, Afghanistan and other countries if exploratory studies are undertaken by competent scholars. In the present stage of our knowledge it might be risky to reject a *janam-sakhi* story, which is otherwise probable, simply because it contains some wrong or improbable details or finds no support in external sources.

A narrative, again, is not necessarily baseless if it is vague or is chronologically wrong or anachronistic. Vagueness implies the writer's lack of full information or his lack of interest in precise statements. In some cases we should be thankful to the author for telling us little instead of inventing details to inflate or embellish his story. Chronology was not the strong point of even professional historians of ancient and medieval India. A chronological error, or the importation of a person who was dead or who existed only in legend, should not be given too much importance if the broad facts are considered deserving of credence.

The earliest Muslim account of Guru Nanak is found in the well known work, *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*, which is usually attributed to Mohsin Fani.<sup>43</sup> The author belonged to the first half of the seventeenth century. He had close contact with the Sikhs; he claims personal acquaintance with the sixth and seventh Gurus. His account of Guru Nanak's life reflects the semi-legendary character which Sikh tradition had already begun to assign to the founder of the faith. His testimony can hardly be regarded as that of 'an independent witness', as some writers claim.<sup>44</sup> Cunningham is not altogether wrong in characterising him as 'a garrulous and somewhat credulous Mahomedan'. On the whole, *Dabistan* is of greater use as a clue to the seventeenth-century image of Guru Nanak than as a biographical narrative.

Among early British writers mention should be made of Browne, the representative of the East India Company at the Court of the puppet Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II, who wrote an account of the Sikhs<sup>45</sup> on the basis of some Hindi accounts in possession of two learned Hindus of Lahore. Forster, who travelled through the Punjab in 1783-84, wrote a short sketch of the Sikhs.<sup>46</sup> He relied

upon 'received tradition' and 'legends which have the least exceptionable claims to credit'.

The first full-fledged British account of the Sikhs is Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs* (1812). The earlier English writers, he observed, did not possess 'opportunities of obtaining more than very general information regarding this extraordinary race', and consequently their narratives, 'though meriting regard, have served more to excite than to gratify curiosity'. So Malcolm proceeded to 'gratify curiosity' by extending the range of his information :

When with the British army in the Punjab, in 1805, I endeavoured to collect materials that would throw light upon the history, manners and religion of the Sikhs.....I succeeded with difficulty in obtaining a copy of the *Adi Granth* and of some historical tracts.....This slender stock of materials was subsequently much enriched by my friend Dr. Leyden, who has favoured me with a translation of several tracts written by Sikh authors in the Penjabi and Duggar dialects, treating of their history and religion.....<sup>47</sup>

In spite of his praiseworthy efforts for collection of materials Malcolm did not succeed in preparing a sketch of Sikh history which might be found very useful by a modern historian. What he wrote is scanty so far as information is concerned, and often lacks in authenticity.

It is obvious that the works of the British writers—Malcolm as also his predecessors and successors including Cunningham—can claim no independent evidentiary value so far as the lives of the Gurus are concerned. They are of some interest simply because they represent Sikh traditions at different stages. Macauliffe took upon himself the task of making 'some reparation to the Sikhs for the insults which Trumpp offered to their Gurus and their religion'. He wrote his great work, as he said, 'from an orthodox Sikh point of view, without any criticism or expression of opinion of his own'. It is for this reason that he found it necessary to have 'miracles which are accepted by many Sikhs..... reverently described' in his volumes.<sup>48</sup> It would hardly be wrong to say that Macauliffe recorded the Sikh traditions in their early twentieth century form.

This brief survey of the available sources is intended to warn

the reader that he cannot expect full and authentic details regarding all phases and aspects of Guru Nanak's life. All that can be offered is a bare outline, with important gaps which cannot be filled up, or can be filled up only with stories which fail to stand strict historical scrutiny. The historian is not yet in a position to offer more than 'a bare skeleton..... which can hardly be regarded as even the necessary minimum'.<sup>49</sup>

Guru Nanak was born in the year 1469; the traditional accounts, however, disagree about the month and day. A date (*Vaisakh Sudi 3, 1526*) corresponding to 15 April, 1469 is recorded in the *Puratan Janam-sakhi*, Miharban's *Janam-sakhi*, the *Gyan Ratnavali* and the *Mahima Prakas (Varatak)*. Miharban's testimony is of particular importance because he belonged to the family of Guru Ram Das. Another date (*Katik Sudi 15, Puranmasi, 1526*), corresponding to a day in November 1469, is given in the *Bala Janam-sakhis*.<sup>50</sup> In view of the weight of evidence on one side and the general incredibility of the Bala tradition, practically all modern writers beginning from Macauliffe<sup>51</sup> accept Vaisakh as the month in which the Guru was born. Some statements of Bhai Gurdas have been sought to be interpreted in support of Vaisakh or Katik; but such interpretations appear to be unwarranted<sup>52</sup> and it is safe to conclude that he is silent regarding the date of Guru Nanak's birth.

Macauliffe says that as late as the Sambat year 1872 the anniversary fair of Guru Nanak's birth was celebrated at Nankana Sahib in the month of Vaisakh. The date of celebration was shifted to Katik in the time of Ranjit Singh at the instance of Bhai Sant Singh Gyani. Anxious to prevent the Sikhs from attending a Hindu fair held at Ram Tirth near Amritsar at the time of the full moon in Katik, he instituted a new fair at Amritsar, to be held at the same time, in honour of Guru Nanak's birth and attracted the Sikhs to that new festival.

A more probable explanation is that the celebration of Guru Nanak's birth at Nankana Sahib in Katik began earlier with a view to avoiding a clash with the celebration of the birth of the Khalsa at Anandpur in the same month. Nankana Sahib was at some distance from the centres of Sikhism at Amritsar and Anandpur. There was

lack of convenient means of transport. Moreover, the predominantly agricultural Sikh community could hardly afford to attend two fairs during the wheat harvesting season.<sup>53</sup> It was found convenient to arrange the fair at Nankana Sahib in Katik. Whether the Bala tradition regarding the Guru's birth in Katik was directly associated with it, either as cause or effect, cannot be determined.

According to the *janam-sakhis* and the *Mahima Prakas*, Guru Nanak was born in his father's house in a village called Talwandi Rai Bhoi, later known as Nankana Sahib, about 40 miles west-south-west of Lahore city. The place is now in West Pakistan (Shekhupura *tahsil*, Lahore district). It has been suggested, however, that he was born elsewhere, in the house of his maternal grandfather in a village called Kahna Katcha or Chahal. There was probably an old tradition to this effect which was accepted by M'Gregor and Cunningham, but its origin cannot be traced. The name 'Nanak' might be taken to imply birth at the residence of the 'nana' or maternal grandfather. From this point of view it should be assumed that the Guru's elder sister was also born in her *nana's* house, for she was called Nanaki. This etymological argument might be connected with a family custom, prevalent in the Punjab as also in some other parts of India, requiring house-wives to repair to their parental homes for confinement. These points, however, cannot outweigh the clear statement in the *janam-sakhis* that the Guru was born 'in the house of Mehta Kalu Bedi of Talwandi Rai Bhoi'.<sup>54</sup>

Talwandi was founded by Rai Bhoi and his descendant, Rai Bular, was the owner of the village at the time of the Guru's birth. He occupies a prominent place in the Sikh tradition as a well-wisher and follower of Guru Nanak. The Guru's father was Kalu, a Khatri, by caste and a Bedi by sub-caste. He was a village land accountant or *patwari*. The Guru's mother was Tripta, 'memorable in Sikh writings for her devotion to her son'. As stated above, the Guru had an elder sister named Nanaki.

The available accounts relating to Guru Nanak's childhood do not lend themselves to historical verification. Immediately after birth he laughed like a wise man and the village astrologer proceeded to worship him. While only five years of age he talked of divine subjects

and became an object of religious adoration among both Hindus and Muslims in the locality. His father took him to the village school when he was seven years old. The precocious child took only one day to learn the alphabet and—what was a more interesting—made an acrostic on it. The letters of the alphabet were taken in consecutive order and "words whose initials they formed were employed to give material expression to the Guru's divine aspirations, his tenets, and his admiration of the attributes of the Creator".<sup>55</sup> After attending the school for some time the Guru told his teacher that he preferred the study of the divine knowledge to secular studies :

Burn worldly love, grind *its ashes* and make it into ink; turn superior intellect into paper.

Make divine love thy pen, and thy heart the writer; ask thy guru and write his instruction.

Write God's name, write His praises, write that He hath neither end nor limit.<sup>56</sup>

A later attempt on the part of Kalu Bedi to have his son educated ended in the same manner. Rai Bular, the kindly landlord promised to appoint Nanak the village land accountant in succession to his father, provided the boy qualified himself by learning Persian in which all official documents and accounts were written at that time.<sup>57</sup> Nanak was placed under a teacher named Rukn-ud-din whom, however, he surprised by composing an acrostic on the letters of the Persian alphabet.<sup>58</sup>

Guru Nanak's educational career was apparently brief and not marked by careful attention to the usual curricula. Apart from his own lack of interest in secular studies there was also lack of opportunity. Talwandi was a small place; it could not boast of a Jogi *math* or a Muslim *khanaqah* which were the usual centres of advanced studies in those days. Such teachers as were available on the spot would normally be capable of giving elementary education only. The *janam-sakhis* would make us believe that the Guru did not make full use of even the meagre opportunities which were available in spite of his great intellectual gifts. His attention was already fixed on religious issues; as a consequence he sought divine knowledge only and took no interest in earthly knowledge.

Macauliffe does not accept what the *janam-sakhis* seek to imply. He says :

The scholastic ignorance of founders of great religions has been made the subject of many a boast on the part of their followers. The object, of course, is that the acquirements and utterances of the religious teachers may be attributed solely to divine inspiration.<sup>59</sup>

That Guru Nanak acquired some proficiency in Persian is evident from the liberal use of Arabic and Persian words in his hymns. Different sources give us the names of three Persian teachers of the Guru : Rukn-ud-din,<sup>60</sup> Qutb-ud-din,<sup>61</sup> Sayyid Hasan.<sup>62</sup> Whatever the teacher's name might be, it appears that there was a firm tradition about the Guru's training in Persian. It is also said that he was taught accounts in Hindi by one Gopal Pandit.<sup>63</sup> This is quite probable. He was introduced by his brother-in-law, Jai Ram, to Daulat Khan Lodi at Sultanpur as an educated man.<sup>64</sup> In trying to secure a job for him Jai Ram was obviously referring to his qualifications for the type of work which he would be required to do. From his appointment as store-keeper it might be inferred that Daulat Khan Lodi was satisfied about his capacity for keeping accounts.

Whatever secular knowledge Guru Nanak might have acquired in his early years, his quest for divine knowledge seems to have led him to many fountains. In the dense forests around Talwandi he came into contact with ascetics and anchorites who had acquired divine knowledge by study, meditation and exchange of ideas with religious teachers in other parts of India. There was much which Nanak could learn from them. Cunningham says :

Nanak appears to have been naturally of a pious disposition and of a reflecting mind, and there is reason to believe that in his youth he made himself familiar with the popular creeds both of the Muhammadans and Hindus and that he gained a general knowledge of the Kuran and the Brahmanical Shastras.<sup>65</sup>

Some of Guru Nanak's hymns—the *Japji*, *Asa-di-Var*, *Sidh Gosht* and *Oankaru*, for example—reveal much more than 'a general knowledge' of scriptures. His references to ancient writers and classical stories and his philosophical discourses with religious

teachers of different sects indicate his profound grasp of religious problems. Such grasp seems to imply actual study of scriptural literature; it could hardly be acquired by mere oral intercourse with saints and mendicants at various places during his travels.

The second important incident in Guru Nanak's childhood—one following his admission into the village school—was his investment with the sacred thread at the age of nine. He did not recognise the sanctity of this traditional ceremony, as he plainly told the family priest, Hardial, who had been commissioned by his father to perform the necessary rites. There is little doubt that the long story woven by the *janam-sakhis* was suggested by the Guru's words in the *Asa-di-Var* :

Make mercy thy cotton, contentment thy thread, continence  
its knot, truth its twist.  
That would make a janeu for the soul; if thou have it, O Brahman,  
then put it on me.<sup>66</sup>

What the Guru said after realisation of Truth is projected backward to create a dramatic situation. As Macauliffe says, some details given in the *janam-sakhis* are :

simply settings for the verses and sayings of Guru Nanak. His followers and admirers found dainty word pictures in his compositions. They considered under what circumstances they could have been produced, and thus devised the framework of a biography in which to exhibit them to the populace.<sup>67</sup>

Sometime between his twelfth and sixteenth years—the *janam-sakhis* differ on this point—Nanak was married to Sulakhani, daughter of Mula, a resident of Batala in the present district of Gurdaspur. In course of time two sons were born, Siri Chand and Lakshmi Das. The *janam-sakhis* are unanimous that there were no other children.

Kalu Bedi pursued the usual routine with a view to equipping his son for the normal worldly life, but there were clear indications that the boy intended to proceed along a different track. He associated continually with religious men and spent much time in 'communings with nature, with his own soul, and with his Creator'. Anxious to divert his attention to secular interests, Kalu Bedi tried

to keep him engaged in useful occupations such as the herding of buffaloes, cultivation of land, shopkeeping and dealing in horses. But Nanak's heart was elsewhere, and due to his unusual behaviour he was popularly credited with madness. To his mother's admonitions he replied :

They who love mammon are painfully ignorant.  
 Without money goods cannot be had from a shop;  
 Without a boat man cannot cross the sea;  
 So, without serving the Guru, there is complete loss.<sup>68</sup>

In reply to his father's advice to be a cultivator he said :

Make thy body the field, good works the seed, irrigate with  
 God's name.  
 Make thy heart the cultivator; God will germinate in thy heart,  
 and thou shalt thus obtain the dignity of nirvan.<sup>69</sup>

He would not be a shopkeeper of the usual type :

*Make the knowledge that life is frail thy shop, the true Name  
 thy stock in trade.....*<sup>70</sup>

There is nothing improbable in the detailed description of these incidents which we find in the *janam-sakhis* although the verses attributed to Nanak at this stage should probably be treated as anachronisms. Many Indian families are familiar with distressing symptoms of other-worldliness on the part of their young members and their reaction follows the line drawn in the *janam-sakhis*. However, Kalu Bedi seems to have been driven to despair by his son's obstinacy. Probably he wanted to cut off the youngman's contact with the ascetics and anchorites in the forests around Talwandi. He asked his son to go to Sultanpur where his brother-in-law, Jai Ram, the husband of Nanaki, was a *modi* or steward under the local governor, Daulat Khan Lodi. It was hoped that Jai Ram would be able to secure for him employment in Government service. Perhaps it was also hoped that regular engagement in official work and the attractions of a big town would divert his attention to worldly pursuits.

But this remonstrances, reinforced by those of his wife, failed to move Nanak. The family members felt that Nanak had lost his reason. A physician was called, but Nanak told him :

Pain is arsenic, the name of God is the antidote,



O ignorant man, take such medicines  
As shall cure thee of thy sins.<sup>71</sup>

Kalu Bedi then sent his son to Chuharkana (in the district of Gujranwala) to work as a merchant. On his way Nanak spent the money given to him by his father to buy food for starving holy men. Instead of proceeding further he returned to Talwandi where his father 'cuffed him for disobedience'. The situation was saved by the arrival of Jai Ram who, supported by Rai Bular, the friendly landlord, persuaded Kalu Bedi to allow Nanak to accompany him to Sultanpur.

Sultanpur, also known as Sultanpur Lodi, is an old town; it was founded, it is said, in the eleventh century by Sultan Khan Lodi, an officer of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni.<sup>72</sup> It lies on the left bank of a rivulet called Kali Bein, 6 miles above the confluence of the Beas and the Sutlej. Situated on the main road between Delhi and Lahore, it was an important commercial centre. It was also a well-known centre of Islamic learning. Towards the close of the fifteenth century it was the capital of the Jalandhar Doab.<sup>73</sup> The local governor was Daulat Khan Lodi, a quarter of the century later played a crucial role in the contest between Babur and Ibrahim Lodi. It is said that he beautified the town, turning it into a *nakhlistan* (green patch) and *shikar-gah* (play hunt).

We are on fairly firm ground in regard to the Sultanpur phase of Guru Nanak's life although it is difficult to accept all the details given in the *Janam-sakhis*. On Jai Ram's recommendation Daulat Khan Lodi employed him as store-keeper, probably as an assistant to Jai Ram who was the *modi* in charge of the governor's granary. Although Nanak had accepted secular occupation his mind had not changed at all. He performed his duties efficiently during the day and sang the praise of God at night. He spent a small portion of his salary for his own maintenance, giving away the rest 'for God's sake'. Here Mardana, a minstrel from Talwandi, joined him. Nanak's daily life is thus described in *Puratan Janam-sakhi* :

By night continually praise was said and when as yet a watch of the night was remaining, the Baba went to the river to bathe. When it became dawn of day, he put on his clothes, applied the

*tiak* to his forehead, and having taken the account book in the office he sat down to write.<sup>74</sup>

It is in connection with his early morning ablutions that we have the first recorded reference to his mystic experience. One day after the bathing he disappeared, probably in the nearby forest, and according to the *Puratan Janam-sakhi*, he was taken to *Dargah Parmeshar Ki* (the Presence of the Lord). God offered him a cup of *amrit* (nectar) and charged him with the mission of preaching the glory of His name :

Nanak, I am with thee. Through thee will my name be magnified. Whosoever follows thee, him will I save. Go into the world to pray and teach mankind how to pray. Be not sullied by the ways of the world. Let your life be one of praise of the Word (*nam*), charity (*dan*), ablution (*isnan*), service (*seva*), and prayer (*simaran*). Nanak, I give thee My pledge. Let this be thy life's mission.<sup>75</sup>

Nanak uttered several hymns,<sup>76</sup> including the *mul mantra* which is not in verse, and was by God's order brought back to earth. He returned to Sultanpur after three days, to the surprise and joy of the local people who had assumed that he had drowned in the river.

The story of Nanak's presence before God is regarded by critical historians as a miraculous embellishment unworthy of credit although Indian spiritual tradition recognises the possibility of the purified soul's meeting with the Supreme Being. But the incident, isolated from the apparently miraculous details, need not be rejected as incredible. Purified in body and soul by bath and deep meditation in the forest, he came face to face with the Supreme Being in a world which is not regulated by physical laws. This experience was a logical stage of the deepest significance in Nanak's spiritual development. It was, as McLeod says,

...a personally decisive and perhaps ecstatic experience, a climactic culmination of years of searching issuing in illumination and in the conviction that he had been called to proclaim divine truth to the world.<sup>77</sup>

The story implies, according to another writer, that

.....at this time Guru Nanak felt an irresistible urge within himself, call it divine if you like, to proclaim the truth that he had inwardly realised.<sup>78</sup>

In this connection one might recall the words of Guru Gobind Singh about himself :

Thus spake God unto me :  
 I have cherished thee as My son  
 And ordained thee to spread the Faith,  
 Go and extend true religion throughout the world  
 And divert the people from evil paths.

... ..  
 For this mission God sent me into the world  
 And on the earth I was born as a mortal.<sup>79</sup>

After his dramatic reappearance Nanak gave away all he had, keeping only the piece of loin cloth left on his body. He observed complete silence, refusing to talk even when questioned by Daulat Khan Lodi himself. Then he joined the *faqirs*; Mardana was his only companion. A day later he spoke, but there was only one sentence which he repeated wherever he opened his lips :

There is no Hindu, there is no Mussalman.

This statement offended the local Qazi and he made representations to the governor. Daulat Khan Lodi sent for Nanak. Asked to explain the meaning of his utterance, Nanak uttered several verses.<sup>80</sup> His purpose was to indicate what he meant by a Mussalman. He concluded :

He is a Mussalman who effaceth himself,  
 Who maketh truth and contentment his holy creed,  
 Who neither toucheth what is standing, nor eateth what has  
 fallen—  
 Such a Mussalman shall go to Paradise.

Nanak's words satisfied the assembly and even brought the governor to his feet.

It has been suggested that portions of this story were 'built up on the basis of certain verses occurring in the compositions of Nanak'.<sup>81</sup> There is, however, hardly anything improbable in the broad outlines of the incident as narrated in the *janam-sakhis*. In the intolerant reign of Sikandar Lodi the apparent implication of Nanak's statement might well have appeared offensive to orthodox Muslim sentiment. The reply was couched in such words that the Qazi could not publicly take exception to it. Even the reference to Daulat Khan Lodi's obeisance to Nanak is by no means incredible. The

*janam-sakhis* tell us that the governor had a high opinion of the Guru's character. Bhai Gurdas says :

Daulat Khan Lodi, (another) upright (disciple), became during his lifetime a (true) *pir* and so obtained immortality.<sup>82</sup>

There is no doubt that Daulat Khan Lodi's high respect for Guru Nanak was enshrined in Sikh tradition.

Another story relating to the period of Guru Nanak's service at Sultanpur deserves mention. He was accused of negligence in performing his duties as the governor's store-keeper. The actual charge was that he gave the people more than they were entitled to get and thereby caused loss to the Government granary. Had the charge been proved he would have been exposed to severe penalties. But when the governor made an investigation it was found that the store was not only full but there was actually some excess. We need not dismiss it as a case of miracle; a very simple explanation has been suggested. Guru Nanak received his salary in kind and spent very little upon himself. He could easily afford to give away most of his share in charity and still show excess in the official stock.<sup>83</sup>

The end of the Guru's stay at Sultanpur provides a convenient opportunity for a look at chronology. For his marriage we can infer three different dates from the accounts given in different *janam-sakhis* : 1481-82, 1483-84 and 1485. The marriage most probably took place before his departure from Talwandi to Sultanpur. Macauliffe says :

All the modern Janamsakhis make Nanak's marriage..... subsequent to.....his departure to Sultanpur. They say that it was Jai Ram who had him married.....If Nanak had been left to his own discretion, and if his marriage had not been made for him by his parents, it is most probable that he would not have turned his attention to that part of a man's duties after entering the service of the government in Sultanpur.<sup>84</sup>

Neither the date of Guru Nanak's arrival at Sultanpur nor the duration of his stay there can be precisely determined. The period of his service fell most probably within the period of Daulat Khan Lodi's administration at Sultanpur. The upper limit of the Guru's stay there would, therefore, be 1500, the approximate date of Daulat Khan Lodi's promotion to governorship of Lahore. The Guru may

have left Sultanpur some years before 1500. We find him at Sayyidpur in 1520. The intervening years were spent in journeys known as *udasis*.<sup>85</sup>

Whatever the exact date of Nanak's departure from Sultanpur might be, there is no doubt that soon after his spiritual enlightenment he assumed the role of a religious teacher (*guru*) in fulfilment of his divine mission and under took long journeys in different parts of India and the adjoining countries and in Western Asia. To these journeys the term *udasi* is applied, for Guru Nanak travelled like an *udasi*, a person who had renounced the world. During his first tour, it is said, he

.....arrayed himself in a strange motley of Hindu and Muhammadan religious habiliments. He put on a mango-coloured jacket, over which he threw a white safa or sheet. On his head he carried the hat of a Musalman Qalandar, while he wore a necklace of bones, and imprinted a saffron mark on his forehead in the style of Hindus.<sup>86</sup>

While proceeding to South India the Guru, we are told,

.....wore wooden sandals, took a stick in his hand, twisted a rope round his head as a turban, and on his forehead put a patch and a streak.<sup>87</sup>

During his journey to the north the Guru, it is said,

...wore leather on his feet and on his head, twisted a rope round his body, and on his forehead stamped a saffron tilak.<sup>88</sup>

While starting for Mecca the Guru, it is said,

.... disguised himself in the blue dress of a Muhammadan pilgrim, took a faqir's staff in his hand and a collection of his hymns under his arms. He also carried with him in the style of a Musalman devotee a cup for his ablutions and a carpet where on to pray.<sup>89</sup>

During the period of residence at Kartarpur the Guru 'doffed his pilgrim's dress, and donned worldly garments to show that he did not desire men to devote themselves exclusively to an ascetic life'.<sup>90</sup>

For a period at least Guru Nanak appears to have practised severe austerities in regard to food. Bhai Gurdas says :

His food was sand and the pod of the *ak*, and his bed he spread on stones.

He performed great austerities, to the supreme satisfaction of God.<sup>91</sup>

In the *Dabistan* we read :

.....Nanak underwent severe austerities. At first he reduced his food, and after some time, he depended upon drinking a little of cow's milk. After that he lived on *ghee* and then on water. Lastly he lived on air like those who, in Hindostan, are called *Pavanaharis* or consumers of air alone.<sup>92</sup>

In the present state of our knowledge it is practically impossible to reconstruct the full history of Guru Nanak's *udasis* with trustworthy details arranged in chronological sequence. *Var I* of Bhai Gurdas, the earliest and the most authentic account, is very scrappy; there is specific mention of Mount Sumeru, Mecca, Medina, Baghdad, Achal Batala and Multan. There is absolutely no doubt that the Guru visited many other places. The *Puratan Janam-sakhi* speaks of five journeys—four major and one minor—and mentions many places. The *Miharban Janam-sakhi* reduces the number of journeys to two, but the list of places mentioned is quite long. The notable omissions in this list are Kamrup, Baghdad and Nanakmata. More over, there are material differences between the *Puratan* and *Miharban* versions in regard to the sequence of the Guru's visits as also the details connected with them. Again, in both versions there are stories intended to demonstrate the Guru's supernatural power. There are obscurities and incongruities regarding geography. In spite of these difficulties an attempt must be made to draw as clear and convincing a picture as possible of Guru Nanak's missionary tours covering a period of about two decades. For this purpose the *Puratan* and the *Miharban Janam-Sakhis* should be taken together to reconstruct the framework, with such data as are available in the *Var* of Bhai Gurdas. Even then there would be gaps which might in some cases be filled up by details collected from other sources.

Having spent some years at Sultanpur Guru Nanak set out on the first journey with Mardana, the faithful minstrel, as his companion. According to the chronological scheme suggested above, the first *udasi* started not later than 1500, probably a few years

earlier. The *Puratan Janam-sakhi* indicates that it took twelve years at the end of which the Guru returned to Talwandi.

Bhai Gurdas gives us a general account :

Baba (Nanak) visited the places of pilgrimage (*tirth*); he went round seeing them all on festival days.

Many people were performing the rites of the old religion, but being devoid of loving adoration these earned them no merit. God had not preordained (them to practise) love; (and so the Guru) found (them) reading the four Vedas and the Smritis (instead).

\* \* \* \* \*

(Guru Nanak met) ascetics, devotees of rigorous virtue, deified mortals, yoga adepts, siddhs, naths, gurus, and disciples.

Crowds gathered (to pay homage to) gods and goddesses, perfected rishis, bhairava, kshetrapal, (and other deities).

\* \* \* \* \*

During his round of the pilgrimage centres and religious fairs he searched but found no true believer (*gurmukh*).

Hindus and Muslims (*Turk*), (he saw them) all—*pirs*, prophets, (men of peace and) nations which live by the sword.

The blind were thrusting the blind into a well.<sup>93</sup>

Here we have a graphic picture of what Guru Nanak saw in the holy places visited by him. Probably he chose festive occasions for his arrival in the *tirthas* so that he could notice, the practical working of the 'old religion' in different parts of the country. His strange dress would not allow him to pass unnoticed in any assemblage of people. Indeed, his appearance would have a dramatic effect and draw curious crowds, giving him an opportunity to expound his teaching through pithy statements.

On leaving Sultanpur the Guru and Mardana proceeded towards the west. In the forests adjoining Sayyidpur the Guru performed *tapasya* for many days and through the grace of God (says Bhai Gurdas) he 'attained perfect union'.<sup>94</sup> Then he entered the city with his companion, took shelter in the house of a carpenter named Lalo. His simple hospitality pleased the Guru, although he found himself 'an object of obloquy because he, the son of a Khatri, abode in the house of a Sudar'. He refused an invitation to a great feast given by Malik Bhago, a local official. The offended host called the Guru to

his presence. The Guru took Lalo's coarse bread in his right hand and Malik Bhago's dainty bread in his left, and squeezed them both. From Lalo's bread there issued milk and from Malik Bhago's, blood. The Guru explained the difference by saying that while Lalo's bread had been earned by honest labour, Malik Bhago's had been obtained by bribery and oppression.<sup>95</sup>

Apart from the miracle of milk and blood flowing from bread, there is nothing improbable in the story. It illustrates one of Guru Nanak's cardinal teachings, *viz.* it is the duty of every householder to earn his living by honest labour, and it demonstrates his condemnation of accumulation of wealth through corrupt and sinful methods.

At Sayyidpur the Guru had another unpleasant experience. Instigated by Malik Bhago, the local governor threw all the Hindu monks and Muslim *faqirs*, including Guru Nanak, into prison with the command that they should cure his son who was ill. On this occasion the Guru composed the famous hymn in *Rag Tilang* prophesying the devastation of Sayyidpur by Babur. It seems that the story was intended to provide a setting for the composition. But the incident could well have happened in an age when it was widely believed that dying persons could be saved by spiritual power.

After release from the prison at Sayyidpur Guru Nanak and his companion wandered about, without entering villages or tarrying on the banks of rivers. This apparently aimless journey led them to the house of a *thag* named Sheikh Sajjan whose evil purpose of throwing his guests into a well was frustrated by the spiritual influence of a song sung by the Guru. The *thag* confessed his sins and became the Guru's disciple after receiving *charanpahul*; the first *dharamsala* was constructed on the spot where this incident took place. The story occurs in all the *janam-sakhis*, but it has been rejected as 'improbable' because they differ in regard to details. Moreover, it has been suggested that its purpose was to provide a setting for one of Guru Nanak's hymns (*Suhi 3*) *i.e.*, the song which is said to have changed the *thag's* heart. It is true that some of the incidents related in the *janam-sakhis* in connection with Guru Nanak's travels were intended to provide settings for his verses,



but there is no convincing evidence that this explanation applies to the present case. It is not unlikely that the *janam-sakhis* put the hymn in the mouth of the Guru in the *thag's* house to add to the importance of the story. Sajjan's change of heart might have been due to the Guru's advice; a song was not indispensable. There are differences of detail between the *janam-sakhis*, but it would be unreal to expect them to be consistent and precise.<sup>96</sup>

The first important place where Guru Nanak made a halt was probably Kurukshetra.<sup>97</sup> A visit to this well-known centre of Hindu pilgrimage would be quite in keeping with the Guru's purpose. He arrived there on the occasion of a solar eclipse with the object of preaching to the assembled pilgrims. He is said to have succeeded in making many converts. An entirely irrelevant discourse on the use of flesh for food has been added to this account. There is little doubt that this addition was connected with a later controversy on vegetarianism.<sup>98</sup>

At Panipat<sup>99</sup> Guru Nanak is said to have met the local *pir* whom the *janam-sakhis* call Shaikh Sharaf. As Shaikh Sharaf had died long ago the Guru apparently met his contemporary successor. The confusion of the *janam-sakhis* on this point should not be treated as sufficient ground for rejection of the entire story. The Guru replied to the *pir's* questions relating to his sectarian affiliation. The *pir* 'kissed his hands and feet'.<sup>100</sup> There is nothing unusual in the reported conversation; miracle played no part in the simple incident. Yet McLeod treats it as an example of 'the natural tendency to introduce an association with the acknowledged great in order that the object of the writer's belief or affection may be shown to be even greater'.<sup>101</sup>

In Delhi, the next halt, the Guru is said to have revived a dead elephant belonging to the reigning sovereign, Ibrahim Lodi.<sup>102</sup> As that Sultan ascended the throne in 1517 the Guru's visit to Delhi after his accession is inconsistent with the chronological pattern of the first *udasi*. Moreover, this story contradicts the statement in the *Puratan janam-sakhi* that Guru Nanak returned to Talwandi twelve years after the journey began. Leaving aside the episode of the elephant as an instance of miraculous power, one might be

practically certain that the Guru halted in Delhi, but a meeting with the Sultan (chronology points to Sikandar Lodi) would be improbable. In another *sakhi*, occurring only in the Miharban tradition, the Sultan of Delhi is named Salem Shah Pathan. He is to be identified with Salim Shah or Islam Shah who ascended the throne of Delhi six years after Guru Nanak's death.

Proceeding towards the north-east Guru Nanak arrived at Hardwar. Finding many pilgrims throwing water towards the east for the manes of their ancestors, he began to throw water towards the west, and when called for an explanation he said that he was watering his fields near Lahore. If, he asked, the water thrown by the pilgrims could reach their ancestors who were in the other world, why should not the water thrown by him irrigate his lands which were far nearer?<sup>103</sup> The Guru's purpose was to demonstrate the futility of rituals. There is nothing incredible in this story; it seems to be quite far-fetched to connect it with ancient Buddhist traditions<sup>104</sup> which were certainly not current when the *janam-sakhis* were written and which their writers were not learned enough to resuscitate from old literature.

From Hardwar<sup>105</sup> Guru Nanak proceeded on to Nanakmata or Gorakhmata<sup>106</sup> where he had discourses with the local *Sidhs*. The next stage was Allahabad where he received homage from a large crowd and held a discourse with some devotees.<sup>107</sup> The sacred city of Banaras was the next halt. Here the most important incident was the Guru's discourse with Pandit Chatur Das, 'the chief Brahman of the holy city', which was versified in a hymn entitled *Oankaru*. The Pandit is said to have fallen at the Guru's feet and become a Sikh. Discourses were held with other Pandits as well.<sup>108</sup>

If Guru Nanak ever had a meeting with Kabir, Banaras was the most likely place. Macauliffe tells us that Kabir was 'dead but not forgotten' when the Guru arrived at Banaras. There is a tradition that a meeting took place in 1506 near Pusa.<sup>109</sup> As we have pointed out in Chapter II, a meeting involves little chronological difficulty although it lacks positive evidence.

On leaving Banaras Guru Nanak went to Patna, Ayodhya and Gaya.<sup>110</sup> At Ayodhya he held discourses with *bhagats* and *pandits*.

At Gaya he spoke on the futility of the Hindu ceremonies for the repose of ancestor's souls.

Some rolls are offered to the gods, some to the manes; but it is the Brahman who kneadeth and eateth them.

The *janam-sakhis*<sup>111</sup> lead us next to a country called Kauru, or Kavaru, ruled by a queen named Nur Shah, and dominated by women famous for their skill in incantation and magic.<sup>112</sup> The female magicians, we are told, converted Mardana into a lamb and even tried their black magic on the Guru himself. But his spiritual power triumphed; the queen and the magicians became his followers.

The country mentioned in the *sakhis* is usually identified with Kamrup, a geographical unit embracing some parts of western Assam. We are unable to accept McLeod's differentiation between the Kamrup of history and geography ('an area in Assam or Bhutan') and the Kamrup of mythology ('a symbol of erotic practice and dark magic'). History knows no female ruler of Kamrup, but tradition is eloquent about black magic practised by its inhabitants. It seems the writers of the *janam-sakhis* had no idea at all about the geography and history of Kamrup, although wild stories about magical practices prevailing there had circulation in the Punjab. Unable to give any definite information about Guru Nanak's experience in that far-off land, and unwilling to leave a vacuum, they made full use of Kamrup's notoriety for magic. As the magical power was primarily a prerogative of women it was only in the fitness of things that the country should be supposed to have a female ruler. There is a firm tradition about Guru Nanak's visit to Assam; it cannot be shaken by the incongruous details recorded by credulous narrators of later times.

The evidence regarding Guru Nanak's visit to Dacca is less than satisfactory. There is no convincing explanation of the inclusion of Dacca in the Guru's itinerary. Dacca had never been regarded as a *tirtha*. It had practically no political or strategic importance till the reign of Akbar. It became the capital of Mughal Bengal in the reign of Jahangir and its political prominence gradually made it a busy centre of trade and industries.<sup>113</sup> So far as Sikh tradition is concerned, the *Puratan* and the *Miharban janam-sakhis* are silent

about Guru Nanak's visit to Dacca. There is a reference in the Bala tradition, but it is not quite certain if there was really any mention of Dacca in the original version.

Macauliffe omits Dacca altogether. A few years after the publication of his book the question of Guru Nanak's visit to Dacca was given prominence by Sardar G. B. Singh through some articles published in the *Dacca Review* (1915-16). He found in Dacca a well, 'out in the waste near Jafarabad, half hidden in bramble growth', which according to local tradition had been dug by Guru Nanak. No literary or epigraphic confirmation of this tradition was found.<sup>114</sup> Its authenticity was initially accepted, and later rejected, by Sardar G. B. Singh. The Sikh monastery at Dacca, with which the well seems to have been connected, was probably founded by Sikh traders in the seventeenth century when Dacca enjoyed much political and commercial importance. Another point also deserves notice. "The Guru", says Macauliffe, "returned from Kamrup by the great river Brahmaputra, and then made a coasting voyage to Puri on the Bay of Bengal."<sup>115</sup> This route would normally keep Dacca off his track. The matter requires further investigation.

Guru Nanak's visit to Puri<sup>116</sup> finds no mention in the *Puratan Janam-sakhi*; but the evidence of other *janam-sakhis* is corroborated by two verses in the well-known Vaishnava poetical work in the Oriya Language the *Chaitanya Bhagavata* by Iswar Das, a biography of Chaitanya. In one of these verses it is stated that Chaitanya and Guru Nanak participated in *kirtan* at Puri. Among the other participants mentioned there are *Saranga*, Rupa and Sanatana, as also Jagai and Madhai. The word *Saranga* probably refers to the *Sarangi* or rebeck-player, *i. e.*, Mardana, whose proper name was not likely to be known to the Bengali author. In the other verse it is stated that while roaming about at Puri Chaitanya had Guru Nanak among his companions. There are material inaccuracies in these details. However, the possibility of a meeting cannot be excluded : probably it took place between March and July 1510.

During his visit to the temple of Jagannath Guru Nanak found that the lamps were lit, rich offerings were placed on salvers studded with pearls, and a fan was employed to excite the flames of the

incense. Ignoring this artificial worship he raised his eyes to heaven and sang :<sup>117</sup>

The firmament is Thy salver  
 The sun and moon Thy lamps;  
 The galaxy of stars as pearls strewn.  
 A mountain of sandal is Thy joss-stick  
 Breezes that blow Thy fan;  
 All the woods and vegetation  
 All flowers that bloom  
 Take their colours from Thy light.<sup>118</sup>

Either on his way to Puri, or on his way back to the Punjab from Puri, Guru Nanak seems to have halted in the present district of Balasore (in Orissa). There is a village named Sangat near Bhadrak (in the Balasore district) where local tradition recalls Guru Nanak's visit. It was probably something more than a casual visit. The impression made on the people by the Guru was reflected in an opera called *Nanak tamasa*. Careful investigation in the Bhadrak area might reveal interesting details.

If Guru Nanak met Chaitanya at Puri in 1510, he probably returned to Talwandi not long afterwards. This would be consistent with our chronological scheme and also with the statement about twelve-year sojourn found in the *Puratan Janam-sakhi*. His reunion with his parents was very brief; he did not return to his father's house, nor did he see his wife. He said :

What separation is there from those who have separated from God? and what meeting is there with those who have met him?<sup>119</sup>

The Guru, accompanied by Mardana, again set out on his travels. He seems to have decided to cover a part of the Punjab before starting again for distant parts of India. Proceeding towards the west and crossing the rivers Ravi and Chenab, he made his way to Pak Pattan which, according to one tradition, he had visited earlier before his arrival at Talwandi. On these occasions, it is said, the Guru met Shaikh Brahm (Ibrahim), the then incumbent of Shaikh Farid's shrine, and delivered discourses.<sup>120</sup>

A young wife sitteth at home, her Beloved is abroad; she continually thinketh of Him and pineth away.  
 She shall have no delay in meeting Him if she have good intentions.

From Pak Pattan Guru Nanak moved north-east and halted at Dipalpur, Kanganpur, Kasur, Patti, Goindwal, Sultanpur, Vairoval, Jalalabad and Kari Pathandi. At the last-mentioned place he made many Pathan converts.<sup>121</sup> Moving north through Batala<sup>122</sup> he is said to have arrived at Sayyidpur for the second time and witnessed Babur's sack of that town. This is part of the itinerary given in the *Puratan janam-sakhi*; the visit to Sayyidpur is included in the first of the four major tours. But this arrangement involves a serious chronological difficulty. The sack of Sayyidpur took place in 1520. The *Miharban Janam-sakhi* places the sayyidpur incident after the Guru's return from the west. This is clearly preferable to the *Puratan* tradition. If the Guru came back to the Punjab directly from Puri in or about 1510, he could not have taken nearly ten years to visit the places mentioned above. It may be presumed, therefore, that on leaving Batala Guru Nanak visited Pasrur, Sialkot and Mithankot and then reached Lahore.<sup>123</sup>

We are now at the concluding point of the first *udasi*. According to the *Puratan Janam-sakhi* (Hafizabad Vali). Guru Nanak settled for a time in a village called Kartarpur, on the right bank of the Ravi, which was founded in his honour by a 'millionaire official'.<sup>124</sup> It has been suggested that before going on another long journey outside the Punjab the Guru wanted to provide a home for his family which had been putting up at Pakhoke with his father-in-law.<sup>125</sup> Here he met Bhai Budha, who was then a child. Here he is said to have composed the *Bara Mah*.<sup>126</sup> He was joined by his father with all his people. He took off his extraordinary costume and dressed in a more conventional manner.

According to the *Puratan Janam-sakhi* Guru Nanak's second journey was to the South. On that occasion he was accompanied by two Jats named Saido and Gheho. In an unidentified country called Dhanasari his companions met a mythical Muslim saint named Khwaja Khizr who was regarded as a river god. The Guru himself held a discourse with a Jain priest and then went to an island in the ocean, ruled by an inhuman tyrant. His attempt to cook the Guru in a cauldron failed. The Guru's next encounter was with a *pir* infected with hypocrisy. The Guru said :

The heart which relinquisheth God's praises and magnification and attacheth itself to a skeleton.  
 Receiveth a hundred reproaches by day and a hundred by night.<sup>127</sup>

These stories represent a fanciful version of the curious ideas which the authors of the *janam-sakhis* entertained about the distant lands in the South. They have no historical value apart from an impression of strange and sometimes hostile environment in which the Guru and his companions moved.

We are on firm ground in regard to the Guru's visit to Ceylon.<sup>128</sup> It appears that this far-off island was no *terra incognita* to enterprising Sikh merchants. Before the Guru's arrival in Ceylon one of them is said to have established his residence there and translated one of his hymns for the King's benefit. According to the Sikh annals the King's name was Shivnabh, but the historical records of Ceylon do not know any such name. The contemporary ruler of the island was Dharmaparakramabahu who ascended the throne in 1493. Epigraphic evidence, recently brought to public notice, shows that in the fifteenth year of his reign—in or about 1508—a religious teacher named Janakacharya met the King, expounded his creed, and asked the King to embrace it. The King agreed to do so provided the new teacher succeeded in defeating in debate Dharmakirtisthavira who was *Sangharaja* or *Sangharaja*-designate. A public debate was then held on the subject of a Supreme Personal Deity and an eternal soul. Janakacharya was able to silence Dharmakirtisthavira. He was supported by the Brahmins who wanted Dharmakirtisthavira to be disgraced. The issue was decided in favour of Jinacharya by a majority of the votes of those who formed the audience. Subsequently, however, the Brahmins ranged themselves against Jinacharya on two grounds. He insisted upon monotheism and rejection of idol worship; he also refused to recognise the supremacy of the Brahmins in a society divided into castes. At their instance another public debate was held between Jinacharya and a *bhiksu* named Dharmadhvaja-pandita who was their nominee. The subjects of the debate were image worship and the pretensions of the Brahmins. Jinacharya was declared defeated;

the Brahmins had arranged to have a majority of the votes cast against him. He left the capital, and the question of the King's conversion did not arise.<sup>129</sup>

This epigraphic account must supersede the confused stories given in the *janam-sakhis*. Although neither Guru Nanak nor Sikhism is mentioned by name, there is little doubt that the episode relates to his experiences in Ceylon. Of particular significance are the grounds on which the Brahmins decided to oppose Jinacharya whom they had earlier accepted as an ally against their Buddhist rival. These grounds also indicate that Jinacharya was not a Jain teacher although the name appears to carry that implication. There is, however, a small chronological difficulty. The epigraphic date for Jinacharya's arrival in the capital of Ceylon is c. 1508. We have noted that Guru Nanak visited Puri in 1510. In view of the epigraphic testimony his visit to Puri should be regarded as posterior to his visit to Ceylon. This assumption throws the sequence of the first and second *udasis* into the melting pot. What is needed is a closer study of the Sikh annals in the light of the Ceylon inscription.

It may be noted that the Miharban *Janam-sakhi* brings the Guru to Rameshwaram from Puri. Proceeding on from Rameshwaram beyond *Setu-bandha* he entered a foreign country in which an unknown language was spoken.<sup>130</sup> Ceylon is not mentioned by name, but there can be little doubt about the identity of this country. The Miharban tradition is chronologically consistent with the Ceylon inscription.

From Ceylon Guru Nanak returned to the Punjab. It has been suggested that he travelled by the west coast and left Sikh congregations at different places.<sup>131</sup> Visits to Ujjain, the Vindhya mountains, the Narmada river, Bikaner (in Rajasthan) and Saurashtra are mentioned in the Miharban *Janam-sakhi* but except in the case of Bikaner all other *Janam-sakhis* are silent about these places.<sup>132</sup>

The third *udasi* covered the North. Guru Nanak was accompanied by Hassu, a smith, and Sihan, a calico-printer. According to Macauliffe, Achal Batala was the Guru's first halt; here he held a long discourse with the Jogis and composed the *Sidh*



*Gosht*.<sup>133</sup> This is inconsistent with the account of Bhai Gurdas<sup>134</sup> who describes the incident in some detail and concludes :

(Guru Nanak) triumphed over the Sivaratri fair, (and followers of) the six systems came and did homage to him.

The Siddhs made this auspicious pronouncement; 'Blessed is Nanak and great are his works!

An Exalted One has appeared and has caused light to shine in this Dark Age!"

Gurdas places this incident after Guru Nanak's tour in the west and says that from Achal Batala he went to Multan.

According to the *Puratan Janam-sakhi* Guru Nanak proceeded on to Srinagar in Kashmir, stayed there for some time and made many converts. There was no happiness in the world, he said.<sup>135</sup>

Shaikhs, Disciples and Pirs weep

For fear of suffering at the last moment;

The miser wept at his departure from the wealth he had amassed;

The pandit wept when he had lost his learning;

The young girl who hath no husband weepth—

Nanak, the whole world is in misery.

After leaving Srinagar Guru Nanak penetrated the Himalayas and scaled many lofty peaks. There are traditions about his visit to Ladakh and Tibet which await literacy or epigraphic confirmation.<sup>136</sup> According to the *Puratan Janam-sakhi* the Guru reached Mount Sumeru where he conversed with many *Sidhs* and—according to one tradition—composed the *Sidh Gosht*.<sup>137</sup>

Bhai Gurdas<sup>138</sup> gives a long account of Guru Nanak's discourse with the *Sidhs* on Mount Sumeru. The eighty four *Sidhs*, Gorakhnath and the others, wondered what power had led him there. The Guru replied :

I repeated (the divine Name of) God and so became imbued with adoring love.

The *Sidhs* asked him what was happening in the world below. He gave a gloomy picture.

Falsehood prevails, (as deep as the darkness of) a moonless night (*amavas*).....

Sin has enslaved the world and (*Dharma*) the bull, standing beneath the earth, lows (in anguish).

His mission, he said, was to search for the truth. Such a *Jogi*, the *Sidhs* thought, would bring glory to their *panth*. The Guru overcame their spell :

By means of the divine word (*Sabad*) he overcame the assembly of Sidhs, distinguishing his way from theirs.

In the Dark Age (Baba) Nanak (imparted) the divine Name which brings peace.

All important *janam-sakhis* describe the incident although they differ in regard to detail. In spite of this unanimity of our sources the tradition, says McLeod, 'must be wholly rejected'.<sup>139</sup> Mount Sumeru, he says, 'exists only in legend, not in fact'. He rejects identification of Mount Sumeru with Mount Kailas, forgetting that it would be unfair to demand a precise knowledge of Himalayan geography from Bhai Gurdas and the authors of the *Janam-sakhis*. He is not prepared to ignore the anachronism involved in the mention of Gorakhnath and the confusion of *Naths* and *Sidhs*.<sup>140</sup> At the root of his scepticism, it appears, lies the preconceived idea that the tradition is derived from the *Sloks* from *Var Ramkali* in which Guru Nanak speaks successively as Isar, Gorakh, Gopichand, Bharathari, and finally as himself. In other words, he treats the Mount Sumeru incident as an instance of what Macauliffe calls 'settings for the verses and compositions of Guru Nanak'. But he does not entirely reject the possibility of Guru Nanak's visit to the Himalayas or even of his advance into the Himalayan world as far as Mount Kailas or Lake Manasa. The tradition regarding the Guru's discourse on Mount Sumeru need not be isolated from the tradition relating to his visit to Ladakh and Tibet. In view of the frequency of his contact with the *Jogis* it is not at all unlikely that on the snowy peaks of the Himalayas he met persons who belonged to the category of *Sidhs*.

Another incident rejected by McLeod is Guru Nanak's visit to Hasan Abdal which is the starting point of Macauliffe's account of the fourth *udasi*, i.e., the Guru's travels in the west.<sup>141</sup> Here, it is said, the Guru raised his hand to reist the headlong flight of a rock rolled down upon him by an angry Muslim *faqir*. An impression of his hand was left on the rock; the place came to be known as

*Panja Sahib*. McLeod connects the story with Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim legends and refers to its late incorporation in the *janam-sakhi* traditions. Leaving aside the miraculous part of the story which offends current rationalism, there is nothing improbable about the Guru's visit to the place and an encounter with a *faqir* who was jealous of his spiritual reputation.

Guru Nanak's visit to the Arabian countries has been treated as a controversial episode for about a century. Bhai Gurdas gives details about his activities in Mecca and Baghdad, and there is a reference to Medina as well.<sup>142</sup> There is no reference to Medina or Baghdad in the *Puratan* and Miharban *Janam-sakhis*, but a visit to Mecca is mentioned by both. Baghdad figures in the *Gyan Ratnavali* as also in the Bala tradition. At the earliest stage of Sikh studies. Trumpp dismissed the tradition concerning Guru Nanak's journey to Mecca as 'an invention from beginning to end'.<sup>143</sup> Macauliffe accepted the traditional version of visits to Mecca, Medina and Baghdad.<sup>144</sup> During the First World War an inscription was found at Baghdad by a Sikh Commander and it was given publicity in 1918. It was interpreted as containing a definite reference to Guru Nanak's presence at Baghdad in 927 H. (1520-21 A. D.) or ten years earlier. Another inscription recording the Guru's presence at Baghdad in 912 H. was also reported to have been found by an Indian traveller. These discoveries practically put an end to the controversy started by Trumpp. But it has recently been revived by McLeod<sup>145</sup> who has dismissed the Mecca and Medina *sakhis* as 'highly improbable' and treated the visit to Baghdad as 'a remote possibility, not a strong one'.

So far as the visit to Mecca is concerned, we should follow the account of Bhai Gurdas, leaving aside the additional details found in the *janam-sakhis* as unnecessary or unworthy of credit. Bhai Gurdas simply states that "Baba Nanak proceeded to Mecca"; he does not indicate the route or the means of transport. It is probable that he took the sea route, sailing in an Arabian trading ship. He put on the dress of a Muslim *faqir*, 'decked in blue garments', carrying 'a staff in his hand, a book under his arm, a water-pot, and a prayer-mat (for) the call to prayer'. On reaching Mecca he 'sat in a mosque',

and while sleeping at night he had his 'feet pointed towards the miharab'. A person named Jivan<sup>146</sup> complained that this was a 'sinful posture'. He 'seized Nanak's legs and dragged them round'.

Mecca also moved round, thus revealing (the Guru's) power.

All were astounded and paid homage to him. The 'qazis and mullahs' then began to question him on religious matters. 'Who is the greater—the Hindu or the Muslim?' Replying to this question Guru Nanak said :

Without good deeds both (will be brought to) weeping.  
Neither the Hindu nor the Muslim finds refuge in (God's) court.  
The safflower's pigment is not fast; it runs when washed in water.<sup>147</sup>

Hindu and Muslim are jealous of each other, (unaware that) Ram and Rahim are one.

The Guru 'won adoration' in Mecca and 'left his sandals relic'.

Modern criticism cannot accept the statement that 'mecca also moved round'. Indeed, such 'revelation' of 'the Guru's power' would be inconsistent with his own teaching. However, there are Islamic traditions regarding the actual physical movement of the holy Ka'aba for Muslim saints. Moreover, a literal interpretation of Bhai Gurdas's statement need not necessarily imply physical movement.<sup>148</sup> Apart from this single point, there is no element of improbability in the story. There was nothing in the Guru's statement about the Muslims which was really offensive to Muslim sentiment. Indeed, in view of the Guru's character and the character of his mission it is altogether inconceivable that he could offend the religious sentiments of any community. The dress he wore had no element of 'conscious deception'; it was simply a recognition of the Muslim way of living in a Muslim environment. Such recognition was quite natural on the part of a great religious teacher who was far above sectarianism.

Bhai Gurdas takes Guru Nanak from Mecca to Baghdad. There he found 'a resting place outside the city' and 'uttered the Muslim call to prayer'. A *pir* named Dastgir<sup>149</sup> asked for a miracle. The Guru took the *pir's* son with him 'into the air'.

In the twinkling of an eye he revealed all of the lakhs of heavens and lakhs of underworlds.

Filling (his) begging-bowl with *prasad* from a *Karahi* he brought it from the nether regions.

Such exhibition of miraculous or supernatural power is ruled out not only by modern historical criticism but also by Guru Nanak's own precept. We must confess that we have no reliable account of his activities in Baghdad. But that, by itself, does not make the visit 'a remote possibility'. Although it is not mentioned either in the *Puratan Janam-sakhi* or in the *Miharban Janam-sakhi* the testimony of Bhai Gurdas should be taken as decisive.

That testimony is supported by two inscriptions, both located in Baghdad,<sup>150</sup> which have been mentioned above. One of them was found on a wall behind a platform indicating the place where Guru Nanak is said to have held discourses with a local *faqir* named Shah Bahlul. It has been translated as follows :

In memory of the Guru, that is the Divine Master Baba Nanak Fakir Aulia, this building has been raised a new, with the help of Seven Saints.

(*Chronogram*) The blessed disciple has produced a spring of grace—year 927 H. (1520-21).

The second inscription, dated 912 H. was found by Swami Ananda Acharya in a shrine outside Baghdad. His translation of it forms part of one of his poems :

Here spake the Hindu Guru Nanak to Faqir Bahlol, and for these sixty winters, since the Guru left Iran, the soul of Bahlol has rested on the Master's word, like a bee poised on a dawn-lit honey-rose.

McLeod rejects the second inscription on the ground that its text had neither been published nor seen by anybody except Swami Ananda Acharya; nothing but his translation is available. "Without access to the original", it is argued, "it is impossible to accept the Swami's poetic testimony as adequate evidence". It has even been suggested that there was only one inscription; the record described and translated in Swami Ananda Acharya's poem was not different from the first inscription mentioned above. In any case Swami Ananda Acharya was neither an archaeologist nor a linguist, and it is plausible to argue that his translation is 'a poetic reconstruction, from memory of an inscription only very imperfectly understood'.

There might be justifiable hesitation in accepting Swami Ananda Acharya's testimony as authentic historical evidence.

The first inscription, however, stands on a different footing. Its existence is not denied or doubted; the text is available. The difficulty lies in regard to its interpretation. There are 'radical differences' concerning translation of the inscription. McLeod quotes five different translations (including the one we have quoted above). Three of them mention a person named (Guru) Murad who is not referred to in the other two. The date given in three translations is 927 H.; one translation gives 917 H., the other gives no date. All the five translations, however, make explicit mention of 'Baba Nanak'. There is, therefore, a general agreement among the translators that the inscription records Guru Nanak's presence in Baghdad. The difference regarding the date is not material : the visit took place either in 927 H. or in 917 H.

McLeod has got the inscription translated by an expert in Turkish, the language in which it is written. The expert's conclusions are as follows : (1) The date recorded in the inscription is 1226 H. (1811-12). (2) Guru Nanak is 'almost certainly not' mentioned in the inscription. (3) The inscription cannot be accepted as evidence of a visit by Guru Nanak to Baghdad. (4) The word 'Murad' occurs in the inscription in its usual lexical meanings, 'desire' or 'wish', but not as a personal name. Another new translation, prepared by an American expert, shows that the inscription, which could not be older than 1700, mentions 'The Saint Baba Nanak' and a date which might be either 917 or 927 H.<sup>151</sup>

Historians are not competent to decide the issue raised by the battle of translators. It may be noted that McLeod's expert is not quite certain that the name of Baba Nanak does not occur in the inscription. If the name is there, and if the inscription is dated 1811-12, we would have a continuous tradition about Guru Nanak's visit to Baghdad covering a period of three centuries. The American expert's translation also points out a continuous tradition till about 1700. If one takes an extreme view and rejects the inscription, the testimony of Bhai Gurdas remains a sufficiently solid basis for the tradition concerning Guru Nanak's visit to Baghdad. It may be added

that saints or prophets have never been interested in leaving archaeological records or remains to commemorate their visits to different places.

A visit to Mecca practically implies a visit to Medina; there is no reason why the Guru should have left one holy city out of his itinerary after visiting another. Bhai Gurdas makes a brief reference :

Having subdued the fortress of Baghdad he overcame all in Mecca and Medina.

No details are available.

Soon afterwards Guru Nanak returned to Kartarpur where he 'put aside all the garments of renunciation'. Then followed (according to Bhai Gurdas) visits to Achal Batala and Multan. According to the Miharban *Janam-sakhis* the visit to Multan preceded the journey to Mecca; after Mecca the Guru visited Hinglaj and Gorakh-hatari. The visit to Gorakh-hatari occurs also in the *Puratan Janam-sakhi*. Here Guru Nanak met some *Sidhs*, and it is said, held the discourse which formed the basis of the *Sidh Gosht*.

It is a generally accepted view that Guru Nanak was present at Sayyidpur<sup>152</sup> when the town was sacked by Babur. The year 1520 is assigned to this incident on the basis of Babur's account.<sup>153</sup> If the Guru was present at Baghdad in 927 H. (1520-21), as the Baghdad inscription most probably shows, he seems to have returned directly to the Punjab at the end of his journey in the west. Departure from Baghdad and arrival at Sayyidpur within a brief period of a few months cannot be ruled out as an improbability.

The primary source of information regarding the Sayyidpur incident is the group of Guru Nanak's hymns in the *Adi Granth*, collectively known as *Babur-vani*.<sup>154</sup> There are clear and direct references to the Mughal-Pathan contest. The Guru says :

Millions of priests tried *by their miraculous power* to restrain *the emperor* when they heard of his approach.

He burned houses, mansions, and palaces; he cut princes to pieces, and had them rolled in the dust.

No Mughal hath become blind; no *priest* hath wrought a miracle. There was a contest between the Mughals and Pathans; the sword was wielded in the battle.

One side aimed and discharged their guns, the other also handled their weapons.<sup>155</sup>

The Guru draws a fearful picture of havoc :

Desecration and desolation follow in the footsteps  
Of the Great Mughal, Babar.  
None, none in Hindustan can eat his supper in peace.  
For the Muslim woman the hour of prayer is past,  
For the Hindu the time of worship is gone.

... ..  
Few, some very few,  
From this havoc return home,

... ..  
Many are lost for ever,  
And weeping and anguish are the lot of those who survive.<sup>156</sup>

The terrible sufferings of disgraced women are recalled in tearful words :

The tresses that adorned these lovely heads,  
And were parted with vermillion,  
Have been shorn with cruel shears;  
Dust have been thrown on their shaven heads.  
They lived in ease in palaces,  
Now they must beg by the roadside,  
Having no place for their shelter.

... ..  
Their beauty and wealth were once their greatest assets,  
Their beauty and wealth are their greatest enemies now;  
Barbarous soldiers have taken them prisoners and disgraced  
them.<sup>157</sup>

None but a very sensitive eye-witness—one whose deep love and affection for the common man had probably acquired a new depth by long travels among unknown people—could give such graphic description of chaos and suffering incidental to medieval warfare. It is poetry indeed, but poetry which is true to life and is soaked with blood and tears. McLeod says :

.....Guru Nanak must have personally witnessed devastation caused by Babur's troops. There is in his descriptions of agony and destruction a vividness and a depth of feeling which can be explained only as expressions of a direct personal experience.<sup>158</sup>

On two points, however, McLeod differs from earlier writers.<sup>159</sup> He holds—on what appear to be rather inadequate grounds—that the incident which form the basis of the Guru's description was not



the sack of Sayyidpur in 1520 but the capture of Lahore in 1524. This is in conflict with the *janam-sakhi* tradition, and there is no explanation of the supposed shifting of the scene to a small town if it was really enacted at the capital of the province. In any case, McLeod's view makes no material change in the accepted pattern of Guru Nanak's biography.

The other point is of real importance. In the *Puratan Janam-sakhi* we have details about Guru Nanak's meetings with Babur. During the general massacre at Sayyidpur the Guru and Mardana were imprisoned and assigned hard physical labour. A miracle followed when the Guru was carrying loads on his head under orders of a Mughal officer. The matter was reported to Babur who went to see the Guru in prison and fell at his feet on hearing one of his hymns.

No one can kill him, O Kind One, whom  
Thou preservest.

How can Thy praises be numbered? Thou savest countless  
beings.

At the Guru's request Babur released the captives of Sayyidpur and restored their property.<sup>160</sup>

McLeod rejects this story because the Miharban *Janam-sakhi* omits it and the *Puratan Janam-sakhi* gives divergent details. It is difficult to see why an omission in the Miharban *Janam-sakhi* should be regarded as of crucial importance : It omits Kamrup, Baghdad and Nanakmata altogether and does not mention Ceylon by name. Again in view of the general character of the *janam-sakhis* we should be prepared for divergence in details almost at every stage. As both Babur and Guru Nanak were present at Sayyidpur at the same time, a meeting between them is quite within the range of probability. The references to miracles indicate the Guru's reputation as a holy man. In those days rulers respected holy men and sought their blessings. Babur is said to have asked the Guru to promise that his empire should continue from generation to generation.

The victory of the Mughals marks a crucial stage in the history of the Punjab, where the rule of the Afghan oligarchy established under the patronage of the Lodi Sultans was overthrown by the

shock of military defeat. This probably led to alterations in the balance of socio-economic power in the province. From a long-term point of view Babur's entry into the Indian political scene inaugurated a new age. But the Mughal system had to pass through political vicissitudes and military reverses before it could consolidate itself. It was during this period of transition that Guru Nanak passed the last years of his life at Kartarpur. His vision extended into the confused future and on the eve of Babur's invasion he is said to have made a significant prophecy :

Bodies shall be cut like shreds of cloth;

Hindustan will remember what I say.

They shall come in '78, depart in '97, and then shall rise another disciple of a hero.<sup>161</sup>

According to Sikh tradition this prophecy hints at the establishment of Mughal rule in Sambat 1578, its collapse (under Humayun) in Sambat 1597, and the rise of Sher Shah. This is consistent with Guru Nanak's reported promise to Babur : 'Thine empire shall remain for a time'.

The third—and last—period of Guru Nanak's life covers the years 1520-1539, *i.e.*, from his experience of the havoc at Sayyidpur to his death. This was the period of his residence at Kartarpur. The period of *udasis* had come to an end. He reverted to the life of a householder, spiritualizing it through the devoted performance of the duties of a teacher of Truth. As Bhai Gurdas says, he 'put aside all the garments of renunciation'.

He clad himself in ordinary clothes, ascended his *gaddi*, and thus appeared (before his people).

... ..  
He gave utterance to words (of divine wisdom), bringing light and driving away darkness.

(He imparted) understanding through discourses and conversation; the unstruck music<sup>162</sup> (of devotional ecstasy) resounded endlessly!

*Sodar* and *Arati*<sup>163</sup> were sung, and in the early morning the *Japji* was recited.

Those who followed him cast off the burden of the Atharva Veda.<sup>164</sup>

The Guru was in the highly exalted condition known as *Sahaj*,

*i.e.*, 'mental and spiritual equipoise without the least intrusion of ego'. He had attained through spiritual perfection a condition of 'unshaken natural and effortless serenity.'<sup>165</sup>

In the quiet of Kartarpur dramatic incidents did not happen; nothing occurred which could attract the story-telling propensities of the writers of *janam-sakhis*. It was a period of propagation of a faith and development of a community. Only two incidents are on record. It was probably during this period that the Guru lost his faithful companion, Mardana, and found a faithful disciple in Lahina of Khadur whom he eventually nominated as his successor.

Bhai Gurdas says :

He.... (before his death) appointed Angad as Guru.

(For) his sons did not obey him, (becoming instead) perfidious rebels and deserters.<sup>166</sup>

In the Coronation Ode we read :

His sons would not obey his words; they turned a deaf ear to their priest.

With evil hearts they became rebels; they took sack loads of sins on their heads.

*Lahina* obeyed what the Guru had ordered him, and earned the reward of his acts.<sup>167</sup>

All accounts agree that the Guru's death took place at Kartarpur. The most probable date is September, 1539, although the *Puratan Janam-sakhi* puts it a year earlier.<sup>168</sup> When the Guru felt that the last moment was drawing near he ordered the assembled people to sing the *Sohila*.<sup>169</sup>

Settled is the date of my last breath

(of my marriage with death)

Friends, pour nuptial oil at my door,

Friends, I crave your blessings

For union with my Master.

To every home is the invitation sent,

To every one will issue the summons, some day,

Worship Him who sends for us

Let the day draw nigh, doth Nanak pray.<sup>170</sup>

The concluding *slok* of the *Japji*<sup>171</sup> was then sung.

Air, water and earth,

Of these are we made.

...      ...      ...      ...  
 The day and night our nurses be  
 That watch over us in our infancy.  
 In their laps we play.  
 The world is our playground.

Our acts right and wrong at Thy Court shall come to judgement,  
 Some be seated near Thy seat, some kept distant.  
 The toils have ended of those that have worshipped Thee,  
 O Nanak, their faces are lit with joyful radiance—many others  
 they set free.<sup>172</sup>

The toils ended : Guru Nanak 'blended his light with Guru  
 Angad's'.<sup>173</sup>

## CHAPTER V

### TEACHINGS OF GURU NANAK

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We have the following brief account of Guru Nanak's teachings in the *Dabistan* :

Nanak believed in (was convinced of) the unity of God as it is laid down in the tenets of Muhammad. He also believed in the doctrine of transmigration. Holding wine and pork unlawful, he abstained from animal food and enjoined against cruelty to animals..... Just as Nanak praised the Muhammadans, he also praised the incarnations and gods and goddesses of the Hindus. But he knew them all to be the creation and not the creator. He denied (the doctrines of) *Halool* (direct descent from or incarnation of God) and *Ittihad* (direct union of the all-pervading God with any particular body.)<sup>1</sup>

This is how a seventeenth-century Muslim with a liberal outlook and in friendly contact with the Sikhs looked at their religious doctrines. The *Adi Granth* had been compiled long before he wrote and the *Panth* had assumed a consolidated form on the basis of Guru Nanak's teachings.

In interpreting those teachings one must rely primarily upon the Guru's own compositions; the compositions of the other Gurus and the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas might be used as explanatory material aiming at clarification of the founder's ideas and injunctions. This process of study involves two difficulties.

In the first place, the *sabads* and *sloks* of Guru Nanak do not constitute a well-arranged, systematic, and integrated exposition of the cardinal doctrines of the faith. He did not write a treatise on religion; he composed songs through which he sought to propagate Truth, and these were arranged by the fifth Guru in terms of musical requirements. For a modern inquirer it is a problem to pursue the thread of ideas and arguments through the scattered verses.

Secondly, words and expressions used by Guru Nanak are sometimes associated with the religious terminology of Brahmins, *Jogis*, *Bhagats* and Muslims. It is not easy to separate those words and expressions from such sectarian association and to determine the precise meaning in which he used them. Careful study and freedom from preconceptions are the necessary clues to the solution of these difficulties. Some European writers<sup>2</sup> have found inconsistencies in Guru Nanak's teachings, but these are more apparent than real. The system contemplated by him does not suffer at all from lack of inner harmony.

Sikhism is not primarily a philosophical system. Guru Nanak, it has been said, 'separated pedantic philosophy from religion' and treated religion as 'less a matter of intellect than of spirit'.<sup>3</sup> He says :

A man may load carts with books; he may load men with books  
*to take with him;*

Books may be put on boats; pits may be filled with them.

A man may read books for months; he may read them for years;  
He may read them for life; he may read them while he hath  
breath;

Nanak, only one word, *God's name* would be of account; all  
else *would be* the senseless discussion of pride.

... ..

The more one readeth and writeth, the more is one tormented.<sup>4</sup>

This does not mean, of course, that Sikhism has no philosophy or that the intellect can be entirely eliminated in our study of Guru Nanak's teachings. The *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas represent the rational and philosophical trend in the interpretation of Sikhism.<sup>5</sup> Guru Nanak's compositions tell us about God, His nature and attributes, and His relation with man and the universe. Instead of drawing authority and inspiration from any revealed scripture he depends upon his own mystical experience to explain the nature of Truth and the 'true way' which leads to salvation. The manner of his exposition—simple, lucid, often related to man's daily experience—and the poetic flavour of his language appeal primarily to the heart and leave little scope for learned controversies on abstract issues in which scholars—Hindu and Muslim—found special pleasure in his days.

He wanted to transfer religion from centres of scholasticism to common men's homes; he wanted men to love God without taking the aid of barren metaphysics.

The starting point of one's study of Guru Nanak's religion must be his concept of God which is expressed in the brief and apparently simple words of the *Mul Mantra* :

There is One God  
 His Name is Truth.  
 He is the Creator,  
 He is without fear and without hate.  
 He is beyond time Immortal,  
 His Spirit pervades the Universe.  
 He is not born,  
 Nor does he die to be born again,  
 He is self-existent.  
 By the Guru's grace thou shalt worship Him.<sup>6</sup>

The opening words are : *Ik Aumkar* ("There is One God"). The emphasis is on *Ik* and it is repeated in Guru Nanak's hymns in different forms and in different contexts. In the *Japji* (xxxii) the Guru says :

Were I given a hundred thousand tongues instead of one,  
 And the hundred thousand multiplied twentyfold, A hundred  
 thousand times would I say, and say again, The Lord of all the  
 worlds is one.<sup>7</sup>

In the *Sohila* we read :

There are six schools of philosophy, six teachers, and six  
 doctrines.  
 The Guru of gurus is but one, though He hath various forms.<sup>8</sup>

In the *Oankaru* the Guru says :

The Lord is manifest in the three worlds.  
 He is the eternal Giver and there is no other.<sup>9</sup>

Guru Nanak's universe of thought revolves round the idea of unity of god. In connection with this cardinal idea the question has been raised whether Guru Nanak accepts the Hindu *trimurti*, Brahma-Vishnu-Siva.<sup>10</sup> It is a controversial issue; the decision would depend primarily upon two passages (ix, xxx) in the *Japji*, which have been differently translated and made to convey different meanings.<sup>11</sup> The reference to Siva, Brahma and Indra in the first

passage (ix) and to the creator, the sustainer and the destroyer of the world in the second passage (xxx) should not be isolated from the Guru's basic concept of God. That these divinities play a subordinate role is clearly stated in the second passage :

.....it is God alone Whose will prevails,  
Others but their obedience render.  
He sees and directs, but is by them unseen.<sup>12</sup>

There is another significant passage in the *Japji* (v) which is differently translated :

The Guru is Shiv; the Guru is Vishnu and  
Brahma; the Guru is Parbati, Lakshmi and  
Saraswati. (*Macauliffe*).<sup>13</sup>  
God is the Destroyer Preserver and Creator,  
God is the Goddess too. (*Khushwant Singh*).<sup>14</sup>

The position is made more clear in another version :

He, the One, is Himself Brahma, Vishnu and  
Siva, and He Himself performs all.  
Thou didst create Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.<sup>15</sup>

Guru Nanak uses Hindu mythology for illustrative purposes, presumably because it would help his Hindu audience to grasp his points. Nowhere does he hint at any modification of his firm faith in the unity of God. Here the gentle preacher is as immovable as a rock.

God is 'self-existent' : he is not born, he does not die.

In human terms this can have no meaning, but human understanding is bounded by strict limitations. The 'self-existence' of God is an affirmation of his absolute nature and beyond this human understanding cannot proceed.<sup>16</sup>

The Hindu doctrine of incarnations is plainly inconsistent with the doctrine of 'self-existence' of God. The *Dabistan* tells us that, while praising the incarnations and gods and goddesses of the Hindus, Guru Nanak 'knew them all to be the creation and not the creator'. To accept the possibility of God's incarnation on earth is to connect him with the endless cycle of birth and death, but "He is beyond time Immortal" :

Before time itself  
There was Truth,  
When time began to run its course  
He became the Truth.



Even now, He is the Truth.<sup>17</sup>

Again, God is *nirankar*, Formless. Stanzas 16-19 of the *Japji* have a common ending :

Mayest Thou endure, O Formless One.<sup>18</sup>

Elsewhere Guru Nanak says that God has neither *rup* nor *rekhia* (material sign) :<sup>19</sup>

A thousand eyes hast Thou, yet no eye hast Thou.

A thousand shapes hast Thou, yet no shape hast Thou.

A thousand feet hast Thou, yet no foot hast Thou.

A thousand nostrils hast Thou, yet no nose hast Thou.

An incarnation of God must belong to a human family, but God 'hath not father or mother or son or brother'. An incarnation is unable to protect himself :

Ram Chandar mourned in his soul for Sita and Lachman :

... ..

Nanak, God is independent : Ram could not erase his destiny.<sup>21</sup>

Those who are regarded in Hindu mythology as incarnations of God are really suppliants at His court :

At God's gate there dwell thousands of

Muhammads, thousands of Brahmas, of Vishnus, and of Shivs;

Thousands upon thousands of exalted Rams, thousands of spiritual guides, thousands of religious garbs.....<sup>22</sup>

Guru Nanak's devotion is addressed directly to the One True Lord, not to any incarnation or manifestation of God in human form.

There is but one Lord of all creation,

Forget Him not.<sup>23</sup>

God is the Creator, *Karta Purukh, Sat Kartar*.

By Him are all forms created,

But His ordinances we do not know,

By Him infused with life and blessed,

By Him are some to excellence elated,

Others born lowly and depressed.

By His writ some have pleasure, others pain;

By His Grace some are saved,

Others doomed to die, re-live and die again.<sup>24</sup>

Guru Nanak's hymn on creation is a moving tribute to the majesty and power of the One True Lord.

In the beginning there was indescribable darkness;

Then was not earth or heaven, naught but God's unequalled

order.

Then was not day, or night, or moon, or sun;

God was meditating on the void.

Then were not continents, or hells, or seven seas, or rivers, or flowing streams.

Nor was there paradise, or a tortoise, or nether regions;

Or the hell or heaven of the Muhammadans, or the Destroyer Death;

Or the hell or heaven of the Hindus, or birth or death;

Then was not Brahma, Vishnu, or Shiv;

No one existed but the One God.

Then was not female, or male, or caste, or birth; nor did any one feel pain or pleasure.

There was no caste or religious garb,

No Brahman or Khatri.

No *hom*, no sacred feasts, no places of pilgrimage to bathe in, nor did any one perform worship.

There was no love, service, no Shiv, or Energy of his;

Then were not Veds or Muhammadan books, no Smritis, no Shastras;

The imperceptible God was Himself the speaker and preacher; Himself unseen He was everything.

When he pleased he created the world;

Without supports he sustained the sky.

He created Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiv, and extended the love of Mammon.

He issued His order and watched over all.<sup>25</sup>

The Creator is immanent in his creation.<sup>26</sup> The 'all prevading immanence of God' is a marvel for the Guru :

Wondrous, my Master, are Thy ways ! Thou dost pervade the waters, the land, and all that is between the heavens and the earth, indwelling in all. Wherever I look there I see Thy light. Of what nature is Thy form? In a single form Thou dost move concealed (in all creation) and yet (in spite of Thy presence) no one person is the same as another.<sup>27</sup>

It is only natural that God should direct and sustain His own creation :

Having created the sun and moon He directs their paths day and night.<sup>28</sup>

But the creation is not given an ever-lasting form; it is followed

by destruction and re-creation. God, Who is Himself timeless, creates and sustains for a time, and then destroys.

Having destroyed He builds and having built He destroys.  
Casting down He raises up and raising up He casts down.<sup>29</sup>

God allows His creation to pass away, demonstrating His absolute power, but He Himself remains eternal and unchangeable.

He Who made creation is, shall be and shall ever remain;  
.....His handiwork His greatness proves.  
What He wills He ordains,  
To Him no one can an order give,  
For He, O Nanak, is the king of kings,  
As He wills so we must live.<sup>30</sup>

The king of kings, says the Guru,

.....consulteth no one when He createth; He consulteth no one  
when he destroyeth; He consulteth no one when He giveth or  
taketh.  
He knoweth His own might; He acteth and causeth others to  
act.<sup>31</sup>

It is not possible for man to comprehend God, formless, uncreated, deathless, never incarnated or manifested in a human body, eternal, changeless, exercising absolute power of creation and destruction. He is *nirguna*, without 'qualities' or attributes; He is transcendental, beyond the three *gunas* created through *maya*. But God can and does assume attributes with a view to bringing Himself within the comprehension of man. Then He voluntarily becomes *saguna*, immanent in His own creation. In His primal aspect, *i.e.*, before creation, God is *nirguna*. Of that transcendental state man can form no idea till he attains union with God. Before the attainment of union man worships *saguna* God. In the *Sidh Gosht* we have Guru Nanak's statement :

He the formless and the immaculate  
From *nirguna*—above qualities  
Became *saguna*—the repositior of all qualities.<sup>32</sup>

This doctrine was put in a cryptic form by Guru Arjan :

He whose power fascinath the whole world,  
Is without the three qualities, and yet possesseth all qualities.<sup>33</sup>

The idea that God is transcendent as also immanent (*niragunu*

*api sagunu bhi ohi*) places Guru Nanak's monotheism in a category different from monotheism in Islam. A Sikh writer says that "from the theoretical point of view Guru Nanak believes in monism".<sup>34</sup> McLeod states the position correctly as follows :

The basis of Guru Nanak's thought is best understood if approached as the thought of one who was essentially a mystic. 'Duality' is to be destroyed, but it is to be a swallowing up in a mystical union. The creation does indeed provided a vital revelation of God but the physical phenomena which impart this revelation are to be regarded as expressions of a God of grace who dwells not only in creation but also beyond it.<sup>35</sup>

Guru Nanak's God is indeed a God of *Grace*. He says in the *Japji* :

Infinite His goodness, and the way of exaltation;  
 Infinite His creation and His benefaction;  
 ... ..  
 O Nanak, His Grace is our bounty  
 His bounty is our treasure.  
 Of His bounty one cannot write too much,  
 He the Great Giver desires not even a mustard seed;  
 ... ..  
 The Lord knows our needs, and gives,  
 Few there be that count their blessings.<sup>36</sup>

The door to salvation is opened by God's *Grace, nazar, kirpa, parsad, daya*. Those who meditate on Him with single mind receive His *Grace*. What He gives is given in accordance with His will.

He upon whom the (Lord's) gracious glance rests, he it is who acquires the glory of the True Name.<sup>37</sup>

Man is initially dependent upon Divine pleasure for spiritual regeneration.<sup>38</sup> "The greatness of the Name is bestowed according to Thy pleasure, O God".<sup>39</sup> As the *Katha Upanishad* says, "only He gains Him whom the Self chooses for Himself".<sup>40</sup>

The word *Nam* might be literally translated as *Name* (of God), but it bears different meanings in different hymns. Some times it is synonymous with God. "The Name is the total expression of all that God is....."<sup>41</sup> Some times it means 'God as revealed or His manifestation'. It is also used to mean 'the word as recorded in the

Holy Scripture<sup>42</sup> or 'the Word as revealed through the Guru'. Sometimes, again, it 'stands for a more or less definite course of religious practice as in the well-known Sikh formula '*nam, dan, isnan*'.<sup>43</sup>

Similar difficulties arise in connection with the interpretation of the word *Sabad*. In Guru Nanak's hymns *Sabad* or *Word* appears to mean the instruction given by the Guru, the communication of God's Truth to the disciple. Guru Amar Das says that a man can 'obtain deliverance by attaching himself to the feet of the true Guru who will communicate to him the Word'.<sup>44</sup> Guru Arjan says: "The Guru's instruction is the Word by which the mind's wanderings cease".<sup>45</sup> The next natural step is the identification of *Sabad* with *Guru* which is clearly noticeable in the compositions of Guru Ram Das and Bhai Gurdas.<sup>46</sup> The merits which accrue to man from hearing the Word are described in several stanzas of the *Japji* (viii-xi).

O Nanak, the Word hath such magic for the worshippers,  
Those that hear, death do not fear,  
Their sorrows end and sins disappear.<sup>47</sup>

It is the Guru who communicates the *Sabad* to the disciple. It is the Guru through whose instruction the love of the *Name* is instilled into one's mind.

God's palace is beautiful.....  
....it is surrounded by a golden fortress.....  
How shall I scale the fortress without a ladder?  
By meditating on God *through the* Guru I shall behold Him.  
The Guru *giving me* God's name is my ladder, my boat and my raft;  
The Guru is the lake, the sea and the boat; the Guru is the sacred stream.  
If it please God, I shall go to bathe in the true tank and *become* pure.<sup>48</sup>

Elsewhere Guru Nanak says :

Without the Guru all is darkness; without the Word nothing can be known.  
By the Guru's instruction light shineth, and man continueth to love the True One.<sup>49</sup>

Without the Guru's guidance no one can attain release (*mokh, moksha*) or salvation. This is a familiar theme in the Guru's hymns. Guru Nanak lays down the qualifications for Guruship :

Take him as *guru* who shows the path of truth; who tells you of the One of whom nothing is known; who tells you of the divine Word.<sup>50</sup>

Historically no Sikh had a choice in this matter, for except in the case of the founder of the faith each successive Guru was nominated by his predecessor. Had choice been given the disciples of Guru Nanak would probably have divided themselves—as the Kabirpanthis actually did—into several groups under the guidance of different Gurus. The principle of nomination ensured unity in the new community which became the most crucial factor in its development.

Each of the nine successors of Guru Nanak had his predecessor as his Guru. Did Guru Nanak recognise any one as his own Guru? He says that his Guru is God :

From the day breath came into my body the divine word has been my *guru*; I endeavour to make my senses serve Him as if they were His disciples.<sup>51</sup>

God, he says, speaks through him : "I speak as Thou hast bidden me to speak".<sup>52</sup> This became a firm tradition and is echoed in *Var* xiii of Bhai Gurdas :

The Supreme Being, the All-pervading God, is the divine Nanak's Guru.<sup>53</sup>

This is in full consonance with the *Janam-sakhi* account of Guru Nanak's mystic enlightenment at Sultanpur.

In some hymns of Guru Nanak the Guru is a mortal being and has no divine attribute. "Nanak referred to himself as the bard (*dhadi*), slave or servant (*chakar*) and even a dog (*kookar*) of God".<sup>54</sup> He is the guide and teacher, mediator and intercessor, but not a divine master. Guru Ram Das compares himself with a retail dealer, his Guru with a 'merchant', *i.e.*, wholesale supplier, and God with his 'stock-in-trade' :

I asked my merchant, the true Guru, for God as my stock-in-trade :

I asked for God as my stock-in-trade and bought His name....<sup>55</sup>  
 Even Bhai Gurdas, 'in whose hands the apotheosis of the Gurus almost reached its culmination',<sup>56</sup> lays stress on the human aspect of the Guruship :

They (*i.e.*, the Sikhs) remember the Guru's hymns in the association of the saints.

... ..  
 The Guru's hymn is the Guru's image, and is repeated in the company of the saints.<sup>57</sup>

There are however, some verses in Guru Nanak's hymns in which the Guru is equated with God and also with the *Word*.

Serve Hari the Guru, the Lake (of immortality), for so you shall obtain honour in His court.

... ..  
 The Guru is God, ineffable, unsearchable.

... ..  
 The Word is the Guru and the mind (which is focussed on it) continually is the disciple.<sup>58</sup>

The equation between the Guru and God found categorical expression in the compositions of Guru Arjan and Bhai Gurdas.

Nanak boweth to the divine Guru, the true Guru, the supreme Brahm, the supreme God. (*Guru Arjan*).<sup>59</sup>

The True Guru is *Niranjan* (God). Do not believe that he is in the form of a man. (*Guru Arjan*).<sup>60</sup>

The supreme God, the perfect God, the primal Being is the True Guru. (*Bhai Gurdas*).<sup>61</sup>

Guru Gobind Singh found it necessary to remind his followers that he was 'God's servant only' :

All who call me the Supreme Being  
 Shall fall into the pit of hell.

Recognize me as God's servant only :  
 Have no doubt whatever of this.

I am the slave of the Supreme Being.<sup>62</sup>

Even in Guru Nanak's time a mystical and impersonal character was attached to the Guruship. The circumstances connected with the nomination of Guru Angad as his successor brought into clear prominence the idea that the Gurus constituted a single personality, succession implying only a change of the mortal image but not of

the spirit. The *Puratan Janam-sakhi* tells us that when Guru Nanak decided to make Lahina his successor 'he put five *paisa* before Guru Angad and fell down before his feet'. In the Coronation Ode it is said :

*Guru Nanak, in bowing to Guru Angad, reversed the order of things.....*

... ..  
He put his umbrella over the head of Lahina who then was exalted to the skies.

*Guru Nanak's light blended with Guru Angad's, and Guru Nanak became absorbed in him.*<sup>63</sup>

This separation between the personality of the Guru, which was subject to the natural process of decay, and the spirit of Guruship—continuous and immortal—is one of the most significant features of Sikhism. The change of Lahina's name to Angad seems almost to imply a physical transformation.

A scion of Guru Nanak exchanged bodies with him and took possession of his throne.<sup>64</sup>

Absolute surrender to the Guru in spirit and unquestioning obedience to him in practice are the essential duties of every Sikh. Guru Nanak teaches this lesson through the nomination of Lahina who, says the Coronation Ode, 'obeyed the orders of *Guru* Nanak whether necessary or unnecessary'.<sup>65</sup> He says :

If thou desire to play at love with me,  
Come my way with thy head in the palm of thy hand.<sup>66</sup>

Guru Amar Das says :

Entrust body, soul, and wealth to the Guru,  
and obey his order, so shall you succeed.<sup>67</sup>

Guru Ram Das asks the Sikhs to 'tie up service to the Guru' as their 'travelling expenses to God'.<sup>68</sup> Bhai Gurdas, himself a devotee of high order, says :

To become a disciple is, as it were, to become dead. It cannot be done by words. A disciple must be patient, faithful, possess a martyr's spirit, and free himself from superstition and fear. He must be like a purchased slave fit to be yoked to any work which may serve his Guru.<sup>69</sup>

How this exacting ideal became a living force in the Sikh



community is illustrated in the story of the 'Five Beloved' who literally walked forward to Guru Gobind Singh at Keshgarh with their heads in the palm of their hands.<sup>70</sup>

The most fundamental query of a man's life, as stated by Guru Nanak in the *Japji*,<sup>71</sup> is this :

How shall the truth be known?  
How the veil of false illusion torn?

He gives his own answer :

O Nanak, thus runneth the writ divine,  
Abide by His will and make it thine.

Just as God is incomprehensible, so is His *Will*; but it is apparently the source of all facts of life :

By Him are all forms created,  
But his ordinances we do not know,  
By Him infused with life and blessed  
By Him are some to excellence elated,  
Others born lowly and depressed.  
By His writ some have pleasure, others pain;  
By His grace some are saved,  
Others doomed to die, re-live and die again.

Birth and death, elevation and depression in conditions of life, pleasure and pain, salvation and transmigration : all these are determined by God's *Will*. Man cannot understand its *rationale*, but it is not capricious. It is 'the divinely instituted and maintained principle governing the existence and movement of the Universe'. It represents the 'Divine Order' controlling the created world.<sup>72</sup>

The doctrine of *Will* or *Hukam* occupies a crucial position in Guru Nanak's teachings. It is *Hukam* which determines the position of man. In accordance with *Hukam* man is placed in the womb, he carries on his work in life, he dies, he is saved or is re-born. Through the *Hukam* is manifest the absolute principle known as Truth. When one understands the *Hukam* one attains to Truth. *Hukam* directs the path to salvation.

Closely related to *Hukam* is *Karma*. Guru Nanak says :

As a man soweth so shall he reap; as he earneth so shall he eat.

... ..

Men are judged according to their acts.<sup>73</sup>

In the *Asa-di-Var* man is held responsible for his own acts :

Every one *must bear the result of his own acts*, and adjust his own account.<sup>74</sup>

In the *Tukhari Chhant* we are told :

An account of every *ghari* and moment shall be taken, and the soul shall obtain punishment or reward.<sup>75</sup>

These verses seem to imply that man is a free agent, free to determine his fate through acts freely performed by him according to his own pleasure. But there are verses in Guru Nanak's hymns which do not recognise such freedom.<sup>76</sup>

Such destiny shall attend it (a new-born child) as God's pen hath recorded upon his forehead.

...      ...      ...      ...  
If it please Thee, Thou *bestowest* a throne and greatness; If it please *Thee*, *Thou* makest man a forlorn mendicant.

...      ...      ...      ...  
By good destiny men meet God and enjoy pleasure even in this life.

Here the determining factor is destiny, not a man's own free act. He is an entirely creature who receives from an inexorable Fate his share of preordained pleasure or pain. Can this approach to man's problems be reconciled with the doctrine of free will? The following answer has been suggested :

Guru Nanak asks of his disciple a total surrender to the Guru, a resignation of his own wisdom, so that he might be saved by the superior wisdom of the Guru. Thus it is evident that as soon as an individual came under the protection of the Guru, the contradiction, referred to above, disappeared so far as he was concerned, because henceforward the Guru alone acted, the disciple having no separate will apart from that of the former, His sole business was to walk in the path laid down by the Guru and carry out his wishes in implicit obedience.<sup>77</sup>

McLeod's explanation is different :

He who recognises the divine Order (*i.e.*, *Hukam*) perceives the Truth; and he who, having recognised it, brings his life into conformity with it ascends to that eternal union with God which is the ultimate beatitude.<sup>78</sup>

On the other hand, he who does not recognise 'the divine order' moves continuously within the cycle of transmigration 'with all its attendant sufferings'.

Perhaps a third explanation might be sought in the doctrine of Divine Grace (*Nazar*).

In the realm of truth is the Formless One  
Who, having created, watches His creation  
And graces us with the blessed vision.<sup>79</sup>

When one is 'graced' with 'the blessed vision' one acts in the right way. *Karma* determines birth, but it is Divine Grace that leads man towards salvation.<sup>80</sup> *Karma* cannot, by itself, bring or deny salvation.

With the doctrine of Karma is associated the doctrine of transmigration or rebirth.<sup>81</sup> Guru Nanak says in the *Asa-di-Var* :

The Creator who made the world hath decreed transmigration.

God is the 'Destroyer of birth', but cessation of rebirth is a great boon granted only to the virtuous.

If a man under the Guru's instruction meditate on the Name, he shall obtain rest, and Death shall not seize him.

Even when this great boon is not granted, a virtuous man may have a pleasant life on the basis of his good deeds in former lives :

Those who performed austerities in their former lives, are now Kings and receive tribute on earth.

They who were then wearied, are now shampooed by *others*.

This is, however, an intermediate stage; man is still chained to the cycle of rebirth. The final stage is thus described by Guru Arjan :

The chains are cut asunder.

Rebirth has ended.

The mind is conquered and victory achieved.<sup>82</sup>

The greatest hurdle which man had to cross on his way to salvation is *haumai*, 'ego' or 'pride'. We read in the *Asa-di-Var* :

In pride man cometh, in pride he departeth;

In pride is man born; in pride he dieth;

In pride he giveth; in pride he taketh;

In pride he earneth; in pride he spendeth;  
 In pride man becometh true *or* false;  
 In pride man meditateth evil *or* good;  
 In pride he goeth to hell or heaven;  
 In pride he rejoiceth, in pride he mourneth;

... ..  
 In pride are the ignorant, in pride the clever;  
*In pride* one knoweth not the value of deliverance or  
 salvation.....<sup>83</sup>

*Haumai* clouds man's judgement and makes him absorbed in *Maya*.

When pride is removed, God's gate is seen.

In the sacred writings of the Sikhs the word *Maya*, says Macauliffe, 'has two meanings—one is mammon; the other is illusion or God's mystic power by which He created matter'.<sup>84</sup> Guru Amar Das says in the *Anand* :

*Maya* is that influence by which God is forgotten, worldly love produced, and man becometh attached to secular things.<sup>85</sup>

*Maya* separates man from God by keeping him absorbed in 'worldly love' and 'secular things'. It is not to be confused with the Vedantic *Maya* which implies that the visible world is unreal. In Sikhism *Maya* implies that the visible world is real but is not permanent. Attachment to this transitory world is the greatest barrier between man and Truth. For him there is a choice between worldly enjoyment and union with God. One who yields to *Maya* is caught in the cycle of transmigration; his chains are not cut asunder.

Guru Nanak's recognition of the reality of the visible world has a logical link with his concept of God. He says in the *Asa-di-Var* :

True are Thy regions and true Thy universes;  
 True Thy worlds and true Thy creation;  
 True Thine acts and all Thy thoughts;  
 True Thine order and true Thy court;  
 True Thy command and true Thy behest;  
 True Thy favour and true Thy signs.<sup>86</sup>

The import of these lines is thus explained by Teja Singh :

Man and nature form one grand truth or reality, not a reality final and abiding, but a reality on account of God's presence in it. Everything in its own degree is as real as God.<sup>87</sup>

Time and physical changes affect the reality of God's creation, but God Himself is a changeless Reality. True are the praises of God; true are those who meditate on Him. Untrue are those who are caught by the fleeting attractions of His impermanent creation.

The goal of man, as prescribed by Guru Nanak, is union with God. The end of man's journey is not conceived in terms of heaven and hell. "Heaven and Hell are states of mind and not geographical localities in time and space".<sup>88</sup> The union which is aimed at cannot be described in terms of human understanding; but it means complete liberation from the cycle of birth and death and dissolution of the individual's *atma* in the *Paramatma*. Says Guru Nanak :

The *atma* is dissolved and is absorbed (in God). (The individual's) *atma* becomes one with the *paramatma* and inner duality dies within.<sup>89</sup>

The state of union is thus described by Guru Ram Dass :

God is pleased with the saints who are pleased with Him. The Lord of light will blend their light with His, and both lights shall unite.<sup>90</sup>

*Nirvana*, says Macauliffe, 'means in Sikh literature to cessation of individual consciousness caused by the blending of the light of the soul with the light of God'.

As water blends with water, when  
Two streams their waves unite,  
The light of human life doth blend  
with God's celestial light.  
No transmigrations then await  
The weary human soul;  
It hath attained its resting-place  
Its peaceful crowning goal.<sup>91</sup>

Progress towards union with the Supreme Being is to be achieved stage by stage. In the *japji* (xxxv-xxxvii)<sup>92</sup> Guru Nanak formulates five stages of spiritual development; each of them is

called a *Khand* or 'realm'.

The first, called *Dharam Khand*, represents the realm of *dharam* or law. Here the emphasis is on the performance of duty. Men are judged by thought and deed; the court of God is adorned by the elect. The second is called *Gian Khand* or the realm of knowledge.

Here one strives to comprehend,  
The golden mount of knowledge ascend  
And learn as did the child-sage Dhruva.

Acquisition of knowledge weakens self-centredness. Then follows the third stage, called *Saram Khand*, which is differently translated : realm of happiness or spiritual endeavour or surrender. Here beauty is resplendent, whereas in the second stage wisdom or divine knowledge is resplendent. The fourth stage is called *Karam Khand*, or the realm of action, where 'effort is supreme' and 'nothing else prevails'. *Sach Khand*, or the realm of truth, is the fifth and final stage. There dwells the Formless One Who watches His creation.

There by a myriad forms are a myriad purposes fulfilled,  
What He ordains is in them instilled.  
What he beholds, thinks and does contemplate  
O Nanak, is too hard to contemplate.

There is much obscurity about the exact purpose which each *Khand* is intended to represent. Some writers have traced this pattern of spiritual stages to the *maqamat* of the Sufis, the second, third, fourth and fifth stages correspond, it is said, to *Shariat*, *Marifat*, *Ufwa* and *Lahut* respectively.<sup>93</sup> Another view is that there is some resemblance with the seven-stage pattern of salvation set out in the *Yoga-vasistha*.<sup>94</sup> The analogy appears to be very superficial in both cases.

Guru Nanak's injunctions for the earnest traveller anxious to cover the five stages of the spiritual journey are clearly set forth in his hymns. His first task was to remove the superstitions and prejudices which were widely prevalent among his contemporaries, both Hindus and Muslims, so as to clear the ground for the propagation of Truth. To his success in this enterprise Guru Arjan

pays an eloquent tribute :

The egg of superstition hath burst; the mind is illumined :  
The Guru hath cut the fetters off the feet and freed the captives.

Conventionalism in the field of religion was Guru Nanak's primary target. The religious spirit of the people had been directed to wrong channels; formal rituals had acquired overriding importance and the true essence of religion had been lost sight of. External practices, the Guru is not tired of repeating, are of no avail in spiritual life.<sup>95</sup> One could not be a true Musulman by merely praying in the mosque, fasting and going to Ka'aba. Kindness, modesty, civility, right conduct and devotion to truth are the qualities required. To a *Jogi* he says :

Religion consisteth not in a patched coat, or in a Jogi's staff, or in ashes smeared over the body;  
Religion consisteth not in earring worn, or a shaven head, or in the blowing of horns.

Purity cannot be ensured by mechanical observance of caste rules if the heart is impure.

Evil-mindedness is a low woman (*dumni*), cruelty a butcher's wife, a slanderous heart a sweeper woman, wrath which ruineth *the world* a pariah woman.

What availeth thee to have drawn the lines of *thy cooking place* when these four are seated with thee?

The Brahmins of Banaras are given the following advice :

You wear necklaces, put sacrificial marks on your foreheads, carry two *dhotis*, and put towels on your heads.

If you know God's designs, you *would know that yours* is verily a vain religion.

Guru Nanak does not, generally speaking recognise the spiritual value of the familiar ritualistic practices.<sup>96</sup>

To give a feast, make a burnt offering, offer alms, perform penance and worship, and endure bodily pain for ever are all of no avail.

'Hundreds of thousands of penances at sacred places', he says, are useless devices. He demonstrates before a crowd assembled at Hardwar the futility of ceremonial bathing in the Ganges. It seems, however, that he recognises the limited value of penances and

pilgrimages.

In the *Japji*<sup>97</sup> he says :

Pilgrimage, austerity, mercy, alms giving and charity  
Bring merit, be it as little as the mustard seed.

Elsewhere he says :

Burnt offerings, sacred feasts, and the reading of the  
Purans,  
If pleasing to God, are acceptable.<sup>98</sup>

But the Guru always insists upon the superiority of true inward devotion. As he says in the *Japji* :

He who hears, believes and cherishes the Word,  
An inner pilgrimage is his need.

It is not only to conventional and external aspects of Hinduism that Guru Nanak's criticism is directed. He criticises two of its basic principles : worship of many gods and sanctity of scriptures. An uncompromising monotheist, he asks the Hindus a direct question :

My brethren, you worship Goddesses and Gods;  
What can you ask them? and what can they give you?  
Even if a stone be washed with water, it will again sink in it.<sup>99</sup>

Regarding the scriptures the Guru's attitude was far less categorical.<sup>100</sup> He refers to the four Vedas as 'four lamps' put 'one by one into the hands of the four ages'.<sup>101</sup> He says in the *Japji* :

He is boundless the Vedas proclaim  
He is in eighteen hundred worlds

the Muslim texts say,

The Reality, behind form is one and the same.

If it could be writ, it would have been, but the writer thereof be none.<sup>102</sup>

This is by no means a clear rejection of the authority of the Vedas and the Muslim texts; the Guru simply says that the scriptures cannot write adequately about the one 'Reality behind forms'. In the *Asa-di-Var*, however, he says :

The four Vedas are true *according to the Hindus*; but if they are read there are *found therein* four *different* doctrines.<sup>103</sup>

Elsewhere he says :



... ..  
 God's secret is not found in the  
 Veds or the books of the Musulmans.<sup>104</sup>

When Pandits claimed that 'by reading the Veds sinful inclinations are destroyed' the Guru's reply was :

When the sun riseth, the moon is not seen.

... ..  
 You, O Pandits, read the Veds and study them,  
 But the reading of the Veds is a secular occupation.<sup>105</sup>

Guru Nanak also refers to the Smritis and says that 'the profit which is obtained from repeating them 'is obtained in one *ghari* by remembering the Name which conferreth greatness'.<sup>106</sup>

As the purpose of Guru Nanak is to bring man face to face with the Supreme Being, there is no room for intermediaries like *avatars* and *prophets* or even for scriptures beyond the intellectual reach of the average devotee. This is his reply to Babur's invitation to embrace Islam and have the advantage of the mediation of God's last Prophet Muhammad :

There are hundreds of thousands of Muhammads, but only one God.

... ..  
 Many Muhammads stand in His Court. So numberless they cannot be reckoned. Prophets have been sent and come into the world.

Whenever He pleaseth He hath them arrested and brought before Him.<sup>107</sup>

If the external practices, reading of scriptures and dependence on prophets are of no avail for salvation, what are the approved methods? In the *Japji* (xxi) Guru Nanak speaks of 'inner pilgrimage and cleansing'. Inside the human body there are desires and evil passions as also the capacity for meditation and divine knowledge.<sup>108</sup>

Within me is the fire, the garden is in bloom, and I have an ocean within my body.

The moon and sun are both in my heart.....

The *Name* purifies the heart :

Day and night repeat the Name, O mortal, that thine impurities may be washed away.

One need not go far in search of God :

The precious jewel, for which men go on pilgrimages, Dwelleth within the heart.

The Lord should be approached through *bhakti*, devotion or loving adoration, comparable in intensity to a bride's yearning for her spouse.<sup>109</sup>

Nanak, the young woman, having seen God her spouse, is delighted and her heart is enraptured.

... ..  
Nanak, the Beloved enjoyeth me day and night; having obtained God as my Spouse, I am a permanent bride.

A man attains *bhakti*, says Guru Nanak, when he 'becomes unconscious of everything else and desires God with all his power'.<sup>110</sup> There must be acute hunger for God in a devotee's heart.<sup>111</sup>

Nanak is hungry for God, and careth for naught besides. I ask for God, I ask for nothing else.

... ..  
My soul burneth without Thee.

*Bhakti* finds expression through listening (*sravan*), singing (*kirtan*), remembering (*simaran*), worship of feet (*pad-sevan*), offering (*archan*), prayer (*vandan*), humility (*das-bhav*), friendship (*maitri-bhav*) and sacrifice of self (*atma-nivedan*).<sup>112</sup> The Vaishnava *bhagats* address their devotion either to God or to any one of the *avatars*, but in Guru Nanak's system there is no room at all for *avatars* and the One Lord Himself is the sole object of loving adoration.

Union with God is the end of spiritual progress. A man whose mind is clouded by evil and, as a consequence, sullied by impurities, is separated from God. A process of 'inner pilgrimage and cleansing', is needed to draw him progressively nearer to God. Of this process *Nam simaran* is the most important part.<sup>113</sup>

The Name is nectar in the heart as well as in the mouth.  
Through it man is freed from worldly desires.

... ..  
If I repeat the Name, I live; if I forget it, I die.

In the Kal age 'there is no longer acquaintance with jog' and

'the holy places in the world have fallen'.

In this Kal age God's name is the best thing.

Mere *Nam japan*, or more or less formal repetition of the *Name*, is not enough; *Nam simaran*, 'remembering the Name', implies meditation on the nature and attributes of God. It is not as easy as it would appear from a superficial point of view. Guru Nanak Says :

It is difficult to repeat the true Name,  
If a man hunger after the true Name,  
His pain shall depart when he satisfieth himself with it.<sup>114</sup>

The seed of the *Name* is to be sown in the human body; the Divine *Grace* will be the crop. 'If the Merciful One is gracious all separation (from Him) comes to an end'.<sup>115</sup>

Is such sowing of the *Name* possible for one who is caught in the snares of a householder's life? Guru Nanak describes 'domestic entanglements' as a 'whirlpool' and sin as 'a stone which floateth not over'. Elsewhere he says :

Entanglements are mother, father, and the whole world;  
Entanglements are sons, daughters, and women;  
Entanglements are religious ceremonies performed through ostentation;  
Entanglements are sons, wives and worldly love in the mind.

... ..

An entanglement is the perishable wealth which merchants amass.

... ..

By the entanglements of worldly love and sin man perisheth.<sup>116</sup>

Instead of advocating escape from such 'entanglements' through renunciation of worldly life Guru Nanak asks man to abide pure among the impurities of the world'. Asked by *Sidh Charpat* how man can cross the ocean called the world, he replies :

As a lotus in the water remaineth dry, as also a waterfowl in the stream,

So by meditating on the Word and repeating God's name, shalt thou be unaffected by the world.<sup>117</sup>

Guru Nanak's rejection of asceticism was not only a precept

but also an example. During his period of travels he was temporarily cut off from the normal householder's life; but at the end of every *udasi* he came back to his family. When the period of travels came finally to an end he settled at Kartarpur, 'put aside all garments of renunciation' (as Bhai Gurdas says and 'found time to attend to agriculture'.<sup>118</sup>

*Jogi* Bhangarnath asked Guru Nanak why he mixed acid with his milk, *i.e.*, why he, a holy man, led a family life. The Guru replied : 'Thou hast become an anchorite after abandoning thy family life, and yet thou goest to beg to the houses of family men. When thou doest nothing here, what canst thou obtain hereafter?'<sup>119</sup>

This emphasis on doing something 'here' is an essential aspect of Guru Nanak's teachings. "There can be no worship without good actions."<sup>120</sup> A holy man, says the Guru, is one 'in whom are to be found friendship, sympathy, pleasure at the welfare of others, and dislike of evil company'. Good action benefits the performer and is on the same time a contribution to social welfare.

They who eat the fruit of their earning and bestow a little *from it*,

O Nanak, recognise the true way.

By *manmukh karam* or perverse act the Guru means 'to be heartily envious of everyone, to desire that worldly wealth and all happiness should forsake others and come to oneself, to suffer great pain as one beholdeth the houses and property of others, to believe all men one's enemies, and do good to no one'.<sup>121</sup>

In Hindu society caste and religion have been inseparable since time immemorial. That caste was to be looked upon as a problem—that it was not an inescapable or even necessary feature of religious life or social organisation—became clear to some Hindu religious reformers of South India where the caste system was exceptionally rigid. Ramanuja barely touched the fringe of the problem. Ramananda tried to grapple with it. His ideas were popularised in North India by Kabir and other *sants*. They released forces of liberalism which most probably penetrated into the Punjab. On the other hand, the Punjab had been familiar with a casteless Muslim society since the early years of the eleventh century. Guru Nanak's

sensitive and receptive mind was thus open to two influences leading in the same direction : an internal process of reform initiated by the *bhagats* and an external example operating as a challenge. Much more important, however, than these was his basic spiritual approach towards the problems of human life.

Guru Nanak was not a social reformer in the ordinary sense of that term. He did not aim directly and specifically at removal of social injustice. His purpose was to lay down a track for man's spiritual journey. For admission to that track no social qualifications—no high rank in the social hierarchy would be needed; a craving for spiritual bliss would be the only passport. In pursuing that track it would be necessary for man to drop his inherited social prejudices. Such a spiritual venture would in itself be a social revolution. And there could be no social revolution in India without considerable erosion—if not total elimination—of the caste system which crippled human dignity and formed a dyke against spiritual regeneration.

From this point of view it is easy to understand the well-known remark of Bhai Gurdas :

By the Guru's instruction the four castes were blended in one society of saints.<sup>122</sup>

If we take this statement in a literal sense it would imply formation of a casteless Sikh society based on removal of traditional restrictions such as prohibition of inter-caste marriage and inter-caste dining. Some statements of Guru Nanak might be quoted in support of such wide interpretation.<sup>123</sup>

Castes are folly, names are folly :  
All creatures have one shelter, *that of God*.

... ..  
What power hath caste? It is the reality that is tested.

There are other statements in which the Guru is clearly viewing the problem of caste from the spiritual standpoint.<sup>124</sup>

*Hereafter neither* man's name nor his caste shall be considered.

... ..  
In the supreme state are seen no castes or caste-marks.

... ..

Caste hath no power in the next world : there is a new *order* of beings.

... ..

No one calleth clarified butter or silk impure;  
Such is a saint in regard to caste.

In the light of such passages in Guru Nanak's hymns it would probably be better to take the statement of Bhai Gurdas in a restricted sense. In other words, by 'blending of four castes in one society of saints' he means—not the immediate removal of the traditional social classification or of external social distinctions—but the elimination of caste as a factor in spiritual life. According to Ramanuja, the grace of God is not available for the Sudra in this life; but by good conduct he may work his way upto birth in a higher caste and then be admitted to the privileged group in social and religious matters.<sup>125</sup> Guru Nanak recognises no such restriction based on birth. In his view every man, irrespective of his position in the caste hierarchy, is eligible for union with the Supreme Being; those who take shelter in God are equals. Behind his saying lies the revolutionary principle that the worth of a man is to be judged solely by the intensity of his devotion to God : the Creator does not look upon caste as a test of eligibility for *Nazar*.

Although the application of this principle would be limited in the first instance to the sphere of religion, it could not but have a powerful impact on society as a whole. That was a necessary consequence of the radical change of outlook derived from Guru Nanak's teachings. Complete elimination of a system which had been the basis of Hindu society for many centuries was extremely difficult, if not impossible; but orthodoxy could hardly resist a breach in the citadel. Thus Guru Nanak prepared the ground for a social revolution even though he did not directly and deliberately initiate it. The seed sown by him developed into a plant in the days of Guru Gobind Singh who said :

Let men of the four castes receive my baptism, eat out of one dish, and feel no disgust or contempt for one another.<sup>126</sup>

Even the tenth Guru's injunction appears to have been only partly effective, for Forster wrote towards the close of the eighteenth century :

They (*i.e.*, the Sikhs) form matrimonial connections only in their own tribes, and adhere implicitly to the rules prescribed by the Hindoo law, in the choice and preparation of their food. The only aliment used in common..... is the *pursaud*, or sacred bread, from the participation of which no tribe or class of their people is excluded.<sup>127</sup>

Unlike other religious reformers of medieval India Guru Nanak had a deep awareness of the political problems—maladministration and insecurity—which affected the daily life of the common people. This was natural for a great teacher whose view of spiritual life centred round the ordinary householder and eschewed asceticism. Moreover, he had a deep sympathy for human suffering, and whenever suffering arose from men-made causes his reaction found expression in poetry.

Guru Nanak's early experience in his village home familiarized him with the work of minor revenue officers. At Sultanpur he found the urban officers carrying on their duties under the control of the regional governor. During his travels in different parts of the Punjab, as also during his residence at Kartarpur where many people came for spiritual consolation, he must have acquired much information about the impact of administrative corruption and oppression upon the people. He condemns what he saw, but he does not put forward any direct plea for reform or rebellion. All that his casual references convey is an impression that he expects the rulers *to* deal justly and fairly with the people.

Guru Nanak did not prescribe the limits of political and spiritual powers and Guru Gobind Singh found it necessary to do in later days. He did not interpret the commission which he had received from God to include temporal power which was to be used for the welfare of the people. To God—and to Him only—man must look for protection : 'Kings and Emperors are all made by him'.<sup>128</sup> God is *asur sanghar* (destroyer of demons); under His *Hukam* righteousness shall ultimately prevail.

The *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas reflect the spirit of self-confidence which inspired the Sikh community in the early years of the seventeenth century. The Sikh religion had already acquired a distinct

character, and he claims for it superiority to other religions.

Where there is one Sikh there is one Sikh; where there are two Sikhs, there is a company of saints; where there are five Sikhs there is God.

'Baba Nanak's praises', he says, 'are sung in every house to the music of cymbals, drums, and rebecks'. And he prays :

May the Guru's Sikhs become hundreds of thousands, yea, countless in the world, and may a Sikh temple decorate every place!<sup>129</sup>



CHAPTER VI  
PLACE OF GURU NANAK IN INDIAN HISTORY

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More than half a century after the death of Guru Nanak the fifth Guru wrote :

The egg of superstition hath burst; the mind is illumined :  
The Guru hath cut the fetters off the feet and freed the captive.<sup>1</sup>

The fetters which kept the medieval man captive were religious as also social. To cut them off was the great objective which Guru Nanak set before himself. In pursuing this objective he acted under the compelling sense of divine mission. This was realised by his faithful followers. As Bhai Gurdas says :

Hearing (mankind's) cry the Beneficent Lord sent Guru Nanak into the world.

... ..  
In the Dark Age (with its multitude of deities) he revealed that there is but One, the Supreme God.  
(He made firm) the bases of the four pillars of *dharma*, and of the four *varnas* he created one.

... ..  
Guru Nanak came for the redemption of the Dark Age.<sup>2</sup>

Guru Arjan represents contemporary tradition when he says :

What to say of me, the ignorant one, millions of sinners have been saved by his instruction. Whosoever happened to see or hear him was saved from the ordeal of being cast into the womb again.<sup>3</sup>

Miharban gives us the following picture of Guru Nanak in a soliloquy of *thags* :

He does not look like a man of the world. He is not a faqir either. He is some great man who seems to have had the privilege of meeting God.<sup>4</sup>

In singing Guru Nanak's praises the poet Kāl practically raises him to a divine status :

In the Satyuga, too, thou enjoyed the state of Rajyoga, when thou 'deceived Bali'.....

And in the Treta age too, when Thou wert called Rama.....

And in the *Duapar* age too as Krishna, when thou delivered Kansa, and blest Ugarsena with a kingdom.....

In the *Kali* age thou wert called Nanak, and Angad and Amar Das.<sup>5</sup>

In the *Dabistān* there is a clear reference to deification of the Guru :

In his (Guru Arjan's) time the Sikhs or disciples became numerous and made exaggerations in the beliefs. They said : "Baba Nanak is God and the world is of his creating". But (in) his hymns Baba Nanak reckoned himself as a slave (of God).....<sup>6</sup>

In the *Mahima Prakas (Varatak)* it is clearly stated that God.

.....observing the deep darkness which prevailed in the *Kaliyuga*, took pity upon the world and for its deliverance assumed a pure incarnation (*avatar*).<sup>7</sup>

This was written long after Guru Gobind Singh's clear warning :

Those who call me God  
Shall fall into the depths of Hell,  
Greet me as God's humble servant only.  
Do not have any doubts that this is true.<sup>8</sup>

The idea that Guru Nanak was an incarnation of God spread from the homeland of Sikhism to other parts of India. In the well-known Marathi work *Bhaktalilamrita*, written by Mahipati about the time when the *Mahima Prakas (Varatak)* was composed, the following words are put in the mouth of Guru Nanak at Mecca :

I am the cause of the creation and of its support and destruction, and I have come here as the spiritual light. Please know that I am the one who is the Doer, and at the same time I am the Non-Doer, one beyond three qualities and beyond *maya*.....The imperishable Spirit of God pervades everything and is beyond *maya*. I am the same Spirit descended as an *avatar* in this mortal world for the benefit of the people.<sup>9</sup>

This process of deification of the Guru is of great importance from the historical point of view. It could not penetrate into Sikhism as a permanent feature, but it bore testimony to the powerful impression which Guru Nanak made not only upon his disciples in the Punjab but also upon men of other faiths in other parts of India. Mahipati wrote in 1774. At that time religion was the primary interest of Indian thinkers who expressed their ideas through the medium of literature. It was natural for them to recognise the greatness of a man by seeking in him supernatural power or divine attributes. A century later political and social issues gripped the attention of India's leaders. Even then Guru Nanak's name and work were invoked as stimulants to the incipient national struggle.

Let us have a glance at the concluding years of the pre-Congress period. Dismissed from the Indian Civil Service, Surendra Nath Banerjee went to England to appeal to the higher authorities. The appeal was of no avail, but during his stay in London he made a careful study of the national movements in Europe with a view to developing a technique suitable for Indian conditions. He was deeply impressed by the history of the 'Young Italy' movement led by Mazzini, particularly by the role played by the youngmen of Italy in liberating their country from the domination of Austria. On his return to Calcutta he joined the Calcutta Students' Association founded by Ananda Mohan Bose. The lectures delivered by him on the platform of this Association established his claims to political leadership.

In these lectures the story of Italian unity and freedom occupied the most prominent place. But, significantly enough, the subject of Surendra Nath's first lecture was the rise of the Sikh power in the Punjab. Drawing his materials from English sources, particularly from Malcolm's *Sketch* :

Surendera Nath for the first time presented the Sikh movement as really a movement of freedom, first, against the current ceremonialism and Brahminical domination of the Hindu community; second, against the oppression of the Moguls, who tried to crush a movement of religious and spiritual freedom by the organised brute-force of an alien Government; and lastly, against British aggression.

This is an extract from the autobiography of Bipin Chandra Pal, who was a student in those days and later became a leader of the extremist wing of the Congress and an associate of Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai ('Lal-Bal-Pal'). Surendra Nath's interpretation of Sikh history would be clear from the following extract from a speech delivered by him in 1878 to youngmen in Calcutta :

Three hundred years ago, in the Punjab, the immortal founder of Sikhism, the meek, the gentle, the blessed Nanak preached the great doctrine of Indian unity and endeavoured to knit together Hindus and Musulmans under the banner of a common faith. That attempt was eminently successful. Nanak became the spiritual founder of the Sikh Empire. He preached the great doctrine of peace and good will between Hindus and Musulmans. And standing in the presence of his great example we too must preach the great doctrine of peace and good will between Hindus and Musulmans, Christians and Parsees, aye between all sections of the great Indian community.<sup>10</sup>

The two extracts quoted above leave little doubt that Surendra Nath was aware of the religious, social and political implications of Guru Nanak's mission. His teachings represented, in his view, 'really a movement of freedom..... against the current ceremonialism and Brahminical domination of the Hindu community'. This was the socio-religious aspect of the movement. In its political aspect, which remained in the background in Guru Nanak's days, it was 'really a movement of freedom', first against 'the oppression of the Moguls' and than against 'British aggression'. Even in those days—when so little was known about the early history of the Sikhs and the characteristics of the Sikh religion—Surendra Nath was able to realise, though dimly, the basic fact that Guru Nanak took an integrated view of life and gave a comprehensive character to his teachings so as to provide solutions for man's social, religious and political problems. By describing Guru Nanak as 'the spiritual founder of the Sikh Empire' Surendra Nath probably sought to imply that from his comprehensive teachings the Sikhs derived those qualities of character and outlook which enabled the *Khalsa* to liberate the Punjab and exercise political authority for about eighty years. Well might the leaders of India's struggle for liberation from the British

yoke pay their tribute to the great teacher whose message continued to provide unerring guidance for his disciples during centuries of historical vicissitudes.

The vitality of Guru Nanak's teachings asserted itself in every crisis which confronted the small community. Neither the cruel persecution of the Mughal Government nor the military power of Ahmad Shah Abdali succeeded in weakening the political struggle of the Sikhs. In the eighteenth century the Afghan conqueror realised—and is said to have remarked—that the reduction of the Sikhs would not be possible till the evaporation of their religious fervour. Speaking about the Maratha War of Independence Ranade observes that the success of those who were sometimes condemned as 'free booters and plunderers' was due to 'a higher moral force which brought out all the virtues of the best men of the nation'. Guru Nanak created 'a higher moral force which brought out all the virtues' of the Sikh community and enabled it not only to survive but also to create a State in a period of ruthless strife. The Sikh mind was illumined and its fetters were cut off; the consequence was the development of its capacity to achieve what was seemingly impossible.

Students of religious history are well aware of the fact that no religion grows out of vacuum. There is always a 'dawn before sunrise': every founder of religion has his predecessor or at least a legacy of ideas. As Macauliffe tells us, "Abrupt indigenous alterations of religion have rarely, if ever been presented to human experience".<sup>11</sup> Guru Nanak was the 'inheritor of a precious religious legacy. India has always been rich in spiritual ideas and religious experiments; orthodoxy and dissent have flourished side by side, each contributing to the fertilisation of the people's mind. Guru Nanak, being the last among India's founders of faiths, used his inheritance in a manner which was his own. He transformed it, giving it new form and new content, and made it an instrument for integrated development of the human personality.

Orthodox Hinduism or the Brahminical religion has always claimed to be based on the Vedas. A modern historian of Indian philosophy writes that 'in spite of considerable changes in the later

periods' the Vedas 'have ever remained as the highest religious authorities for all sections of the Hindus at all times'.

Even at this day all the obligatory religious duties of the Hindus at birth, marriage, death, etc., are performed according to the old Vedic ritual. The prayer which a Brahman now says three times a day are the same selections of Vedic verses as were used as prayer verses two or three thousand years ago.....Most of the Sanskrit literatures which flourished after the Vedas base upon them their validity, and appeal to them as their authority. Systems of Hindu philosophy.....owe their allegiance to the Vedas.....The laws which regulate the social, legal, domestic and religious customs and rites of the Hindus even to the present day are said to be more systematized memories of the old Vedic teachings....<sup>12</sup>

Guru Nanak was fully aware of the sanctity and importance assigned to the Vedas by the Hindus. It is hardly likely that he was well read in the Vedas, but his compositions testify to his general acquaintance with their contents. A modern writer says :

Besides being a Bedi (one who has a knowledge of the Vedas) it is legitimate to conclude that he studied the sacred Hindu texts. Even a casual reading of this hymns reveals the influence of the *Rig Veda*, the *Upanishads*—notably the *Mandukya*, *Chandogya*, *Prasna*, *Katha* and the *Bhagvad Gita*.<sup>13</sup>

Some cases of close similarity between verses in the *Rig Veda* and hymns in the *Adi Grānth* have been pointed out.<sup>14</sup> God, says the Guru, 'put four lamps (*i.e.*, four Vedas) one by one into the hands of the four *ages*'.<sup>15</sup> The origin of Guru Nanak's concept of creation has been traced to the *Upanishads*.<sup>16</sup>

The True One made the air,  
From air came water  
From the waters He made the three regions.

The concept of *Aumkar* in the *Japji* may be traced directly to the *Mandukya*, *Katha* and *Prasna Upanishads*.<sup>17</sup> The Great Tree with leaves representing the songs of the Vedas, described in Chapter XV of the *Gita*, is mentioned in the *Adi Granth*.<sup>18</sup> The philosophy of the Vedas and the *Upanishads* was later elaborated into six systems (*Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyaya*, *Vaisesika*, *Mimansa* and *Vedanta*) to which Guru Nanak refers in a hymn :

Six the sacred texts  
 Six the Gurus who wrote them  
 Six the messages they left.<sup>19</sup>

Guru Nanak differs from these systems not only in regard to details but also on the basic assumption of the supreme authority of the Vedas.<sup>20</sup>

Similarities between the philosophical ideas of the Vedas and the Upanishads on the one hand and the hymns of Guru Nanak on the other would be an interesting subject of study for students of comparative religion. Students of history, however, have greater interest in ascertaining whether the similarities had any practical impact upon the Guru's injunctions on religious and social matters. Differences appear to have deeper roots than similarities; indeed, they are so fundamental as to make Sikhism a definite protest against the Vedic way of life. Guru Nanak rejected rituals and priests; he rejected the whole concept of *varnasrama dharma* and the sanctity of *deva-bhasha* ('the language of the god's, i.e., Sanskrit). Above all, he rejected the authority of the Vedas, the foundation on which the entire Brahminical system rested from time immemorial. The result was that the Vedic traditions played no recognisable part in the development of Sikhism.

The adoption of the language of the people as the medium of religious instruction and worship in place of the *deva-bhasha* which had a complete monopoly in this field had historical antecedents.

So long as the appeal had been, more or less, to the intelligentsia the old texts had sufficed. Only re-interpretations had been necessary from time to time and Sanskrit was adequate to serve as the medium. But the advent of Islam had changed the whole situation; the masses had now to be taken into confidence and the teaching administered in a language intelligible to them. This is why the teachers of the medieval *bhakti* school took up the vernaculars as the medium of their instruction and propaganda.<sup>21</sup>

It is probably not quite correct to connect this process with 'the advent of Islam', for the early Vaishnavas of the South had used Tamil as their medium for expression of religious ecstasy. It was really the necessary consequences of the popularisation of

religion aimed at by the expounders of the *bhakti* cult. Here Guru Nanak was not required to break new ground, for the track had been laid by reformers like Ramananda, Kabir and Namdev. He continued and strengthened the practice of using the people's language for developing and propagating a people's religion. His own poetic genius contributed in no small measure to the success of this revolutionary experiment. When the *Adi Granth* came to be compiled more than six decades after his death a reversion to Sanskrit was inconceivable. The *loka-bhasa* replaced the *deva-bhasa* and brought religion to the heart of the masses. There was no need at all for a priest or an interpreter to guide—or misguide and exploit the illiterate and ill-educated people. Religion ceased to be a mystery behind a linguistic curtain; it became a part of life, a matter of daily experience.

One effect of the exclusive employment of the vernacular as the sole medium of religious worship was that Sikhism could not spread beyond the area in which that language was understood. The languages used in the *Adi Granth* are Punjabi and Hindi. The former was an exclusively provincial language; the latter was understood in Northern and parts of Central India only, leaving Eastern, Southern and Western India outside its range. Although there were isolated Sikh *sangats* in places far away from the Punjab<sup>22</sup> it must be recognised that Sikhism has all along been primarily a provincial religion. Bengal Vaishnavism offers a contrast. It powerfully affected other provinces like Orissa and Assam; its message spread in South India as also in Western India, and one of its principal centres was a place outside Bengal, Brindaban. This difference between the two reformed faiths may have been partly due to linguistic grounds. The philosophy of Bengal Vaishnavism was expounded by learned teachers like Rupa Goswami and Jiva Goswami in Sanskrit, a language understood all over India. There was, thus, no linguistic barrier to the spread of Vaishnavism. Sikhism, on the other hand, was expounded verbally by the Gurus in languages which were practically not understood beyond the frontiers of the Punjab. Of the ten Gurus, only Nanak, Tegh Bahadur and Gobind Singh travelled extensively outside the Punjab. It is difficult to



ascertain how many local converts they made beyond the homeland of Sikhism. Their number could not have been large, and they, or their descendants, must have found it difficult to maintain a living contact with their new faith. For about three quarters of a century after its birth Sikhism had no scripture, no authoritative work in which the faithful could find the solution of his spiritual doubts and the satisfaction of his spiritual cravings. Even the compilation of the *Adi Granth* did not solve this vital problem. How could a non-Punjabi Sikh living at Dhubri or at Nander understand the holy book? A Sikh merchant might be his neighbour, but all Sikhs were not competent to explain the scripture. No such difficulty was experienced by a Tamil or Assamese or Rajput Vaishnava who was personally ignorant of Sanskrit, for Sanskrit-knowing *pandits* were then available in every Indian village.<sup>23</sup>

While recognising this difficulty it should also be noted that the very confinement within the limits of the Punjab gave Sikhism a compactness and solidarity which Bengal Vaishnavism could never attain due partly to its wide distribution in different provinces. Living within the boundaries of one single province, speaking the same language, familiar with the same political, economic and social conditions, the Sikhs lived as fellow members of a common society, united by religious and social ties which became stronger and stronger with the lapse of time. There was no such geographical, political, economic or social unity within Bengal Vaishnavism; the bond of a common faith was there, but it was not strong enough to transcend all barriers.

Looking at the question of scriptures from another point of view it is necessary to note that the compilation of the *Adi Granth* was a momentous factor in the development of Sikhism. The holy book became, and remains to this day, the symbol and embodiment of Sikh unity. Fortunately for the Sikhs, conflicting commentaries did not obscure its meaning as they did in the case of the *Quran*. Bengal Vaishnavism did not provide its votaries with an authoritative scripture like the *Adi Granth*. The *Bhagavata Purana*, differently interpreted in conflicting commentaries, written against a background which had long ago lost touch with historical reality, speaking through

a language which was a mystery to millions of Vaishnavas, inspired by a difficult philosophical idealism beyond their understanding, could not fill up in the Vaishnava society the place accorded to the *Adi Granth* by the Sikhs.

This comparison between Sikhism and Bengal Vaishnavism brings us to the wider question of the relation between the former and the *bhakti* cult in general. To our brief discussion of this question in an earlier Chapter we would add some general observations. Kabir's alleged influence on Nanak is a matter of controversy.<sup>24</sup> Even if the two saints had a meeting and a discussion it does not follow that one must have been influenced by the other. On issues like rejection of the authority of the Vedas and disapproval of asceticism Kabir was inclined towards compromises which were not quite consistent with Guru Nanak's teachings. There was much in common between them, but they looked at life from a fundamentally different point of view. Guru Nanak, it has been said, 'was not an enwrapped visionary like Kabir'; he was 'far too deeply interested in the fate of his fellow beings upon earth to linger long in the rare mystic regions'.<sup>25</sup> Deeply impressed by the futility and misery of life Kabir sought as much isolation from life as possible instead of formulating a constructive programme of reconciliation of man's spiritual and material needs.

In the sphere of religion the main pillar of Guru Nanak's system was unqualified monotheism which involved total elimination of incarnations and subordinate deities. The *bhagats* in general were far less consistent in this regard; their liberal use of religious mythology and tradition kept the door open for worship of many gods and observance of idolatrous rituals. As Cunningham says :

Instead of the circumscribed divinity, the anthropomorphous God of Ramanund and Kubeer, he loftily invokes the Lord as the one, the sole, the timeless being, the creator, the self-existent, the incomprehensible, and the everlasting.<sup>26</sup>

The *bhagats* probably felt that they were using familiar imageries for purposes of illustration or literary embellishment. But the effect upon their illiterate or ill-educated followers was different. They felt they still moved in the old familiar world of gods and

ceremonies, with some new liberal practices and beautiful songs. The identification of Rama or Hari with the Supreme Being meant little for them in concrete terms : they felt free to continue their worship of Rama or Hari in the traditional manner. Relapse into old Hinduism was natural, almost inevitable. From such merger the Sikhs were saved by Guru Nanak's repeated insistence on the unity of God. No *bhagat* called upon his disciples to sing every morning : 'There is One God'. To quote Cunningham again :

He addresses equally the Moolla and the Pundit, the Dervish and the Soonyassee, and tells them to remember *that* Lord of Lords who had seen come and go numberless Mahomets and Vishnoos and Sivas<sup>27</sup>

Closely integrated with religion was Guru Nanak's programme of social regeneration, of which the abolition of the caste system was the cardinal point. The *bhagats* also had a similar programme, but it was comparatively narrow and modest. They sought to soften the rigours of the caste system by accommodating in their respective sects men from the lower castes, including the so-called untouchables, and conferring upon them a spiritual dignity which had been beyond their reach for many centuries. This was social generosity rather than social revolution, for "the privilege of equality was not extended to men as men, but to those individuals only who had washed away their untouchability with the love of God".<sup>28</sup> Even while praying to God Rav Das cannot forget his low birth :

My caste is low, my lineage low, and low is my birth.....<sup>29</sup> A 'Dum, a Chandal, or a Malecch', he says, 'becometh pure by worshipping God'.<sup>30</sup>

Sikhism takes a much more catholic view. It recognises the equality of men as men; for attaining equality purification through the love of God is not regarded as a condition precedent. This approach to the question of caste is an appropriate prelude to a real social revolution. Though that revolution proved to be a long and difficult process, as we have argued in a previous Chapter, the foundations of a casteless society were well and truly laid by Guru Nanak, and his successors continued to build till the structure reached its full height and solidarity.

For a rational reorientation of the prevailing social outlook changes other than the abolition of caste were also necessary. Asceticism involved renunciation of social responsibilities and avoidable misery for family members. Yet it was a practice hallowed by Hindus and Muslims alike; ascetics—true or false—attracted veneration and offerings. Guru Nanak was uncompromising in his opposition to asceticism. He killed, by example and precept, the old idea that a householder's life was a barrier to spiritual progress. Indeed, he emphasized the point that honest labour was a necessary qualification for one who sought realisation of God.

He who eats what he has earned by his own labour and gives some (to others)—Nanak, he it is who knows the true way.<sup>31</sup>

In a few simple words Guru Nanak urges the need for honest labour for livelihood, underlines the value of social co-operation, and points out the earliest path of salvation. In the context of social conditions prevailing in his days this was a revolutionary concept of the duties of man. It prepared the ground for the emergence of a community dedicated to work, fully conscious of personal and social responsibilities, and anxious to reconcile service to man with service to God. It was another landmark in the differentiation of the Sikhs from the general body of the Hindus. Many *bhagats* including Kabir earned their livelihood by taking up their respective caste professions, but none of them specifically urged respect for a householder's life or declared that it was 'the true way'.

The degraded position of women among both Hindus and Muslims of Guru Nanak's days weakened family life and sapped the vitality of society as a whole. Guru Nanak was the only medieval reformer who offered a rational solution of this problem. He offered women a new status of high respect and dignity as mothers and partners of life. In many hymns the Guru speaks of God as a husband and of himself as His wife; spiritual happiness is likened to connubial bliss.<sup>32</sup>

If a woman become virtuous and turn her heart into a thread,  
She shall string her Spouse's heart thereon like a priceless gem.

... ..

Thou shalt be known as a devoted happy wife if thou love the  
Bridegroom.

... ..  
A young wife sitteth at home, her Beloved is abroad; she  
continually thinketh of Him and pineth away;

... ..  
She is beautiful amongst women of beauty; on her forehead  
she wears the jewel of love.

Her beauty and wisdom are bewitching, her love is true and  
infinite.

She knows no man besides her Beloved.....

Apart from the deep meaning of these verses from the spiritual point of view they give us a glimpse into domestic bliss springing from happy partnership between man and woman. Such partnership was the basis on which a meaningful householder's life would rest. The idealisation of connubial bliss was intended to soften the rigours of daily life and to show that heaven and earth could meet even in humble homes.

The *bhagats* concentrated their eyes on heaven : the earth was a mere passing illusion and all that it could offer was suffering in various forms, convulsions which were a necessary element in the process of decay. Says Kabir :

Man is born and groweth up, and when he hath grown up he  
dieth;

We see that the world passeth away *in this wise*.

Diest thou not a shame talking of thy house?

At the last moment nothing is thine.<sup>33</sup>

When 'the world passeth away' why should one take any notice even of political strife which had serious repercussions on security and peace? Even the most careful study of the compositions of the *bhagats* does not bring out any reference to the political vicissitudes which took place during their times. But Guru Nanak was not a casual or indifferent witness of the political turmoil through which the Punjab had to pass in connection with the fall of the Lodi regime.

The only interval in the Guru's life involving a direct contact with the machinery of the State was his period of service at Sultanpur under Daulat Khan Lodi. This, however, had no political implication;

the official position occupied by the Guru had no political importance, and Daulat Khan Lodi had not yet attained the prominence which came to him after his appointment as governor of Lahore. The Guru's prophetic mission had not yet commenced; his mind was agitated by spiritual queries but he had not found all answers.

The crucial incident occurred when Guru Nanak was at the height of his spiritual power. He was present at Sayyidpur when the town was sacked by Babur. There is no convincing reason to reject the tradition of his meeting with the Mughal Emperor. The verses in which the Guru describes the sufferings of the people of Sayyidpur<sup>34</sup> reflect the direct experience of a warm-hearted human being whose eyes were fixed simultaneously on heaven and earth. Apart from the pathos and poetry of the hymns collectively known as *Babur-vani* we have in them some indications of the most crucial political problem of his age. He was categorical in his condemnation of the Lodis :

The dogs of Lodi have spoiled the priceless inheritance; when they are dead no one will regard them.<sup>35</sup>

...      ...      ...      ...  
Pursuing worldly love and sensual pleasure, The princes of Hindustan have lost their heads.<sup>36</sup>

The prophecy attributed to the Guru, implying that the newly established Mughal regime would be short-lived, may be interpreted as his condemnation of the atrocities through which Babur was seizing the throne of Hindustan. In the flow of blood and tears the Guru saw the worthlessness of the rulers, the cruelty of the invaders, and the helplessness of the people. 'How completely helpless mere men are', he declares. It is God's Will that is done, for ever and ever.<sup>37</sup> Sitting in the 'city of corpses' Guru Nanak asks his Lord :

Thou art part and parcel of all things equally, O Creator,  
Thou must feel for all men and all nations.  
If a strong man attacketh another who is equally strong,  
Where is the grief in this, or whose is the grievance?  
But when a fierce tiger preys on the helpless cattle,  
The Herdsman must answer for it.<sup>38</sup>

But the Divine Will is incomprehensible and ever just :  
 Just and true is the Lord; just and true is His judgement.  
 Just and true is the Judgement he meteth out  
 As a warning to us all.<sup>39</sup>

Thus the issue is reduced to a moral problem : in the punishment of the guilty Lodis and the apparently not-guilty people of Sayyidpur the Guru sees the operation of the divine order or *Hukam* which is beyond the comprehension of mortals but is essentially just.

Glory unto Thee, O Lord of Glory,  
 Who can understand Thy ways, O God?  
 Surely Thy ways are strange and Thy dispensation !<sup>40</sup>

Even then the clue to man's suffering might be found in his lapse from virtue; otherwise the *Hukam* would appear to be arbitrary. Him whom the Creator destroyeth He first depriveth of virtue.

Referring to the victims of the Mughal atrocities the Guru says :  
 If those folk had taken heed to the future,  
 Need they have been reduced to such plight?<sup>41</sup>

The *Puratan Janam-sakhi* tells us that Guru Nanak's heart was 'filled with wrath' when he found, just before the sack of Sayyidpur, that some hungry *faqirs* who asked for food were everywhere refused. Here is an explanation of the misfortunes which the unkind people of the town suffered soon afterwards. In the *Miharban Janam-sakhi* the didactic aspect of the story is clearly stated :

Those who do not heed a faqir's request are tormented in Hell.<sup>42</sup>

There was as yet no question of the people taking up arms to protect themselves. The Sikh community was still in its infancy and the moral degeneration of the age did not provide an environment congenial for resistance. The people had to look to God, and to Him only, for support.

He who looketh for human support  
 Loseth both this world and the next.  
 There is but One Giver, the whole world are beggars.<sup>43</sup>

It is only by attaching oneself to God's *Name* that one is saved :

Even if he be drowning *in sin*, God will still take care of him.

Nanak, the True One is beneficent to all.<sup>44</sup>

Thus Guru Nanak's reaction to the great political storm leads us to the central point of his teachings : submission to the Will of God and repetition of His *Name*. This would prepare the ground for moral regeneration which would stimulate man's capacity for self-assertion and self-defence. Guru Nanak's immediate purpose was to develop the potentialities of man so that he could qualify himself for succour from God in the crises of life. No other religious teacher of the medieval period looked at political problems as powerful factors affecting man's place in the moral world; none of them laid down a broad track along which solution had to be sought.

Finally, Guru Nanak was far in advance of the *bhagats* so far as the creation of a new community was concerned. Two important features of his teachings deserve mention in this connection. First, they had the qualities of precision and directness which were lacking in the more or less mystical utterances of Kabir and others. Instead of releasing floating ideas which held the ordinary mind in a mystic grip but did not activate it. Guru Nanak told the people what to aim at and how to proceed. This aspect of Guru Nanak's missionary work must be regarded as a primary factor in the development of Sikhism as a faith with a distinct individuality, providing a basis for a socio-religious organisation (*Panth*) with a personality of its own. Had Guru Nanak's message lacked those qualities, it is more than probable that his followers would have survived only as a minor—almost unnoticed—sect like the Kabirpanthis, being virtually submerged under the tide of Hinduism. The creed laid down by Guru Nanak was simple, and in simplicity lay a part of its attraction for the common people. As M'Gregor says :

The simplicity and purity of the doctrines taught and inculcated by Nanak, were the means of drawing towards him many who had troubled themselves but little with the complicated structure of the Hindoo religion, polluted, as it had become, by the worship of images and idols.<sup>45</sup>

The creed was also to some extent rigid (simplicity often implied some amount of rigidity), but it was elastic enough to provide a



structure within which the Sikh community could grow for more than a century and a half till an entirely new environment called for the reforms introduced by Guru Gobind Singh. As history shows, the teachings of other medieval reformers did not provide any such opportunity for growth; they created sects which were gradually swallowed up by Hinduism.

The second point to be noticed is the originality of Guru Nanak's teachings in at least two vital respects. One of these was the renunciation of asceticism. From time immemorial religion for householders had been distinguished from religion for *Sannyasis*. Religious teachers usually played the role of ascetics, guiding their followers from a distance. It was not recognised that the *Guru* and his *grihastha* (householder) disciples could form an integrated community. Although Guru Nanak came into contact with many ascetics—Hindu and Muslim—during the two decades of his wandering life, he resumed the life of a householder when he settled down at Kartarpur and probably joined his followers in their daily labours in pursuance of his own precept on the need to earn one's own living. His preference for the householder's life was indicated also by his choice of Angad, a householder with wife and children, as his successor. It was a revolutionary as also a decisive step. By barring the door to asceticism for the Gurus he made Sikhism a householder's religion in a special sense. The Gurus lived the same life outwardly as their disciples did; they shared their joys and sorrows. The human side of their character gave a new tone and intensity to their spiritual leadership. It was an excellent way of promoting solidarity within the community.

A far more vital aspect of Guru Nanak's originality was the establishment of Guruship as a continuing institution. The concept of Guruship was very familiar in Hindu religious tradition. A hierarchical chain of preceptors (*pir*, *shaikh*, *imam*, *qutb*) was known to Islam. But Guru Nanak gave Guruship a new form and content. By nominating Angad as successor he established a precedent and initiated a tradition which moulded the Sikhs into an integrated community under uninterrupted spiritual leadership as nothing else could have done. In this revolutionary step he was not

anticipated or followed by any other medieval reformer. Trumpp rightly says that

the disciples of Nanak would no doubt have soon dispersed and gradually disappeared, as well as the disciples of many other Gurus before Nanak, if he had not taken care to appoint a successor before his death.<sup>46</sup>

It was the crucial turning point in the separation of Guru Nanak's disciples from the general body of the Hindus. He resembled other medieval reformers in revitalising religion and morality; but he was alone in creating a distinct and self-conscious socio-religious community which was destined to play a fruitful and glorious role in his country's history.

It was not only the fact of nomination of a successor that was important; the Guruship, it appears, was given an impersonal character by Guru Nanak himself before his death. In the *Coronation Ode* it is stated :

*Guru Nanak, in bowing to Guru Angad, reversed the order of things....*

... ..  
He put his umbrella over the head of Lahina who then was exalted to the skies.

*Guru Nanak's light blended with Guru Angad's and Guru Nanak became absorbed in him.*<sup>47</sup>

"The personality of the Guru was detached from the Guruship which was to be regarded as one, indivisible and continuous".<sup>48</sup> The idea is stressed repeatedly in the compositions of Bhai Gurdas.<sup>49</sup> It was well known to the author of the *Dabistan*. The Sikhs, he says,

.... go so far that when Nanak left his body he absorbed (himself) in Guru Angad.....and that Guru Angad is Nanak himself. After that at the time of his death, Guru Angad entered into the body of Amardas in the above mentioned manner. He in the same manner occupied a place in the body of Ramdas, and Ramdas in the same way united with Arjun Mal.<sup>50</sup>

Guru Gobind Singh expresses the idea as follows :

Nanak assumed the body of Angad

... ..  
Afterwards *Nanak* was called Amar Das,

As one lamp is lit from another.

... ..

The holy Nanak was revered as Angad,

Angad was recognised as Amar Das.

And Amar Das became Ram Das.

The pious saw this, but not the fools,

Who thought them all distinct;

But some rare person recognized that they were all one.<sup>51</sup>

This entirely novel feature of the Guruship in Sikhism distinguishes it from similar institutions in other religions. It played a crucial role in promoting solidarity within the Sikh community. Unlike Vaishnavism, Sikhism was able to organise itself under the shelter and inspiration of a central authority. The Guruship provided cohesion and ensured unity.

Along with this pivotal institution there developed local bodies called *Sangats* or holy assemblies and free common kitchens called *Pangats* or *Langars*. Although trustworthy details about these two institutions in the days of Guru Nanak are not available, there is little doubt that a beginning was made in his time and it was left for his successors to use them as instruments for the consolidation of the community and the propagation of the faith. Bhai Gurdas says :

He struck his coin in the world and inaugurated the establishment of his holy *Panth*.

... ..

He firmly laid the foundation of the abode of Truth in the congregation of saints and inaugurated the *Panth* of the Godly saints.

The Hindus have (their religious centres) on the Ganges (at Hardwar) and at Banaras, and the Musulmans in Ka'aba at Mecca;

But the hymns of Baba Nanak are being sung in every home to the accompaniment of cymbals, drums and rebecks.<sup>52</sup>

In this connection it is necessary to consider the significance of the *udasis* as a very interesting aspect of Guru Nanak's missionary work. The *Janam-sakhi* statement that he visited Talwandi twelve years after he had left Sultanpur has been connected with the custom among the Hindu *Sannyasis* of re-visiting their

birth place twelve years after their initiation.<sup>53</sup> There is, however, nothing in common between Guru Nanak and the Hindu *Sannyasis* of his age so far as these journeys are concerned. No Hindu *Sannyasi* would be accompanied by men of low social status like Mardana, Saido and Gheho. The Hindu *Sannyasis* went to holy places as pilgrims, but Guru Nanak did not regard pilgrimage as a source of religious merit. Above all, no Hindu *Sannyasi* would dream of going to Muslim holy places in distant lands. Sea voyages had been prohibited for Hindus in ancient times by *Smriti* texts. This prohibition was intensified in medieval times in the *Kalivarjya* text.<sup>54</sup>

Judged from a purely human aspect, the *Udasis* were a marvel of endurance and patience. It has been rightly said :

When we consider the difficulties of moving about, the hardness of times, and the diversity of political, social and religious regions, through which he had to pass during his travels, we cannot but marvel at the energy and patience with which he adapted himself to the ever-changing forces of his time.<sup>55</sup>

It is obvious that he did not go to different parts of India and Western Asia to seek Truth, for he had already realised :

There is One God  
His Name is Truth.<sup>56</sup>

In his talks with Brahmins, Jogis, *pirs*, Jain ascetics and others he is never the inquirer or learner; he is always the teacher who points out mistakes and indicates 'the true way'. At Banaras 'the chief Brahman of the holy city' is said to have 'twitted him with possessing no salagram'. The Guru replied :

Why irrigate barren land and waste thy life?  
Why apply plaster to a frail tottering wall?  
Repeating God's name, form a raft *for thy* salvation.....<sup>57</sup>

At Mount Sumeru, says Bhai Gurdas.

(From his answer) all the Siddhs perceived that it was for the salvation of the Dark Age that Nanak had been born.<sup>58</sup>

In Arabia and Iran, says Bhai Gurdas,

Having subdued the fortress of Baghdad he overcame all in Mecca and Medina.<sup>59</sup>

When the Jain priest Narbhi said that he violated all rules and

destroyed life and could hardly be pardoned, the Guru replied :

When the true Guru is merciful, faith's perfected.

When the true Guru is merciful, man shall never grieve.<sup>60</sup>

At Batala the Guru 'vanquished in argument all priests who attended the fair; the followers of the six schools of philosophy had to bow before him'.<sup>61</sup> In Ceylon he defeated in public debate the most learned Buddhist *sthavira* in the royal court.

The journeys were, therefore, 'not in search of truth but to propagate the truth he already knew'.<sup>62</sup> Taking a firm stand on Truth as he had realised it he refuted all arguments seeking to raise the externals above the essentials. He was the only religious missionary from India in medieval times who sought to propagate this country's religious message in foreign lands. In the early sixteenth century he made a great experiment which was repeated in the late nineteenth by Swami Vivekananda. It was a unique expression of idealism, self-confidence and faith in the capacity of man to achieve wonders.

Certain external affinities between Sikhism and Islam have been given greater importance than they probably deserve. Thus Carpenter says :

The movement of Nanak was fed from two sources, and attempted to establish a religion combining the higher elements of Hinduism and Islam alike.<sup>63</sup>

Sikhism, says Toynbee,

Is the creation of an ex-Hindu religious inquirer who adopted monotheism and rejected caste system under the inspiration of Islam.<sup>64</sup>

Tara Chand goes further and says :

It is clear that Nanak took the prophet of Islam as his model, and his teaching was naturally deeply coloured by this fact.<sup>65</sup>

It was perhaps natural to find in Guru Nanak's teachings some echoes of Islam which was the dominant religion in the world in which he lived. Of all North Indian provinces the Punjab had the longest experience of Islam in politics, society and religion. Preachers of orthodox Islam as also Sufism were familiar figures with whom the Punjabi Hindus had frequent contact. Guru Nanak probably met such men in his early youth in the forests around

Talwandi. According to the *Dabistan*, it was a *darvesh* who 'captivated his heart so much' that he distributed among the poor the grain stocked in Daulat Khan Lodi's store.<sup>66</sup> The inscription of Baghdad has been interpreted by one writer to mean that

Guru Nanak appear to have been a follower of Guru Murad and it may not be improbable that the latter is the person referred to by Mohsin Fani.<sup>67</sup>

The epigraphic reference to Murad had been given greater importance than Macauliffe's statement, based firmly on Sikh tradition, that God Himself was Guru Nanak's Guru.<sup>68</sup> On this point Guru Nanak's own statement, supplemented by what Bhai Gurdas says, must supersede inferences from doubtful data. As Guru Nanak received his mission from God Himself the question of taking lessons from any human Guru does not arise.

Guru Nanak's monotheism, says a Sikh writer, 'might be due to Semitic influence'.<sup>69</sup> But monotheism was a cardinal feature of the *bhakti* cult; if Guru Nanak was really in need of borrowing, it was not at all necessary for him to turn to Islam. Moreover, his monotheism has a distinctive feature of its own; it combines the transcendental and immanent aspects of God. Guru Nanak's God is ever merciful, unlike the Semitic God who is sometimes wrathful.

Another Sikh writer, while recognising that the philosophy of Sikhism, as propounded by Guru Nanak has no place for a prophet, comes to the conclusion that 'from the religious point of view', as developed by the Sikhs, Guru Nanak is their prophet.<sup>70</sup> This distinction between philosophical and religious concepts of the position of a prophet is not consistent with Guru Nanak's teachings. God gave Him Light and ordered him to spread it to remove the darkness prevailing in the world. He said :

What my mind receives are the words of the Master O Lalo. I simply transmit the same to others.<sup>71</sup>

In Islamic theology the concept of Prophethood is wider : the Prophet is the sole channel of communication between God and mankind. Islam recognises one Muhammad, but Guru Nanak says :

There are hundreds of thousands of Muhammads.

... ..  
So numberless they cannot be reckoned.<sup>72</sup>

Mian Mitha challenged the Guru :

The first name is that of God, the second that of the Prophet.

O Nanak, if thou repeat the Creed, thou shalt find acceptance in God's court.

The Guru replied :

The first name is that of God; how many prophets are at His gate!

O Shaikh, from good intentions, and thou shalt find acceptance in God's court.<sup>73</sup>

The purpose of the Guru is to bring man face to face with the Supreme Being; there is no room for intermediaries between God and man whose relation is frequently compared in the Guru's compositions to the relation between husband and wife.

In the days of Guru Nanak the Sikhs had no scripture. His general attitude towards scriptures of other religions is clearly expressed in the following words :

Neither the Veda nor the Kateb know the mystery.<sup>74</sup>

No one who was really influenced by Islam could have made such a statement. Every Muslim believes that the *Quran* 'knows the mystery', for its teachings represent direct revelations from God. In the hymns of Guru Nanak we do not have such direct revelations related primarily to particular problems. His utterances represent the spiritual understanding and insight of an enlightened mind favoured with the grace of God and commissioned by Him as a teacher of mankind.<sup>75</sup>

Guru Nanak's intimate acquaintance with Islamic lore is quite evident to all serious students of his hymns. Some times Quranic ideas from the background of his statements. For instance, it has been suggested that the hymn *Akhan jivan visrai mar jaun* in *Rag Asa* echoes the sentiment of the following statement in the *Quran* :

He who turneth away from the path of Allah is dead.<sup>76</sup>

There is some similarity between Guru Nanak's doctrine of

*Hukam* and the Quaranic concept of the Will of God.<sup>77</sup> Words and expressions of Islamic origin are not infrequently used. For example, an Arabic word *qudret* had been used to indicate an important philosophical concept; it has been given a wide import so as to cover the two Quaranic attributes of God, *Al-Qadir* and *Al-Khaliq*.<sup>78</sup> Instances might be multiplied. Indeed, it was only natural that Guru Nanak should use Islamic expressions and imageries. He was, it has been said, well familiar with the contents of the *Quran*, 'it being part of the high culture of Islamic Asia, of which the Punjab was an integral part in the fifteenth century'.<sup>79</sup> But it would not be correct to attach too much importance to borrowed words; they need not stand in all cases for total transplantation of ideas.

One might find a parallel in Guru Nanak's use of certain expressions which appear to have been borrowed from the *Jogis*. Particular reference has been made to two terms : '*sahaj*' and '*anahad sabad*' used by Kabir and Guru Nanak and connected with 'Nath antecedents'. Two points deserve attention in this connection. First, it is not clear whether these two words were used exactly in the same sense by the *Jogis* and Guru Nanak. A critical and comparative study of *Nath* religious literature might throw some light on this problem. Both these expressions have a mystic content and it would hardly be correct to suppose that they bear a really common connotation in different religious systems. Secondly, whatever their origin might be (in these two cases the origin could probably be traced to Tantric Buddhism), such expressions gradually become the common property of different orders and assume different shades of meaning in the context of sectarian philosophy. In such cases the question of borrowing becomes more or less academic; philology rather than philosophy is interested in migration of words which does not necessarily involve substantial migration of ideas and principles.

It is not easy to resist the temptation of equating loan of words with loan of ideas in the field of religion. Such resistance, however, is a necessary precaution in the case of the impact of Sufism on Sikhism. Tara Chand says :



How deep Guru Nanak's debt is to Islam, it is hardly necessary to state, for it is so evident in his words and thoughts. Manifestly he was steeped in Sufi lore and the fact of the matter is, that it is much harder to find how much exactly he drew from the Hindu scriptures.<sup>80</sup>

One might easily admit that Guru Nanak was 'steeped in Sufi lore', but this does not necessarily mean that he adopted the Sufi view of religion. There are, of course, interesting similarities in respect of some ideas and literary imageries. Guru Nanak advises man to seek God in his own heart :

By meditating on God in my own heart I shall become like Him.<sup>81</sup>

The heart, according to the Sufis, is the seat of Divine grace, and there the Lord is to be sought. The relation between God and the devotee is compared, in Guru Nanak's hymns as also in Sufi writings, to the relation between husband and wife. Some apparent miracles well established in Sikh traditions might have interesting explanations from the Sufi point of view. A Muslim writer says :

The story of the Ka'aba moving to the direction in which Guru Nanak's feet were turned, harks back to the Sufi belief that great saints need not circumambulate the Ka'aba; wherever they may be, the Ka'aba will appear before their eyes.<sup>82</sup>

The spiritual journey prescribed by Guru Nanak from *Dharm Khand* to *Sach Khand* is more or less similar to that of the Sufis, although it would be wrong to stretch the analogy too far.<sup>83</sup>

There are, however, crucial differences on two basic points. First, a strong tendency towards pantheism developed within Sufism as a result of its contact with external forces, but Sikhism remained conspicuously free from it. Guru Nanak's adherence to monotheism is unqualified and reiterated with meaningful frequency. Secondly, the idea of transmigration is accepted by Guru Nanak; but it found no recognition from the Sufis in general, although some mystics like Rumi are said to have 'Islamised the transmigration and incarnation theories'.<sup>84</sup>

We are now brought face to face with a fundamental issue : Did Guru Nanak found a new religion, or did he make a mere synthesis of different faiths, 'bringing to light'—to quote Toynbee<sup>85</sup>—

'and gathering together, the cardinal religious truth and precepts that had been scattered, in explicit form or implicitly, through the religious legacies of a number of forerunners of his'?

In answering this question one might analyse Guru Nanak's teachings with a view to measuring the extent of his debt to Brahminical Hinduism and Islam, to the *bhagats*, the *Jogis* and the sufis, as also to many others with whom he came into contact in course of his journeys. Such an analysis would be useful but not conclusive. As a Sikh writer says;

If we analyse the philosophy and religion of the Sikhs into bits and pieces then there is nothing what we can call original or new in it. But I do not think that in this sense anybody can assert absolute originality of any system, philosophy or religion, of the world. The absolute newness is inconceivable.<sup>86</sup>

Much more important than the extent of actual borrowing is the use which has been made of the borrowed ideas; for their import and mutual relations might have been altered so as to give them a new form as also a new substance. This is what Guru Nanak did. As Greenless says :

The Guru may have picked up words and phrases here and there from those with whom he spoke; he may have woven these into the pattern of his revelation; but the teaching he gave the world was won 'from his own undisturbed communing with nature, his own soul and with his creator'.<sup>87</sup>

There are writers who do not accept this view; Guru Nanak, they hold, had no intention of founding a new religion. In Toynbee's words, perhaps he himself 'would have modestly disclaimed the title of founder'.<sup>88</sup> Indubhusan Banerjee treats him as a reformer within the fold of Hinduism and argues that the emergence of Sikhism as a separate religion was the result of the later historical developments. He says :

Sikhism, no doubt, had its start in a protest but it was a protest against conventionalism and not against Hinduism.....He was out not to kill but to heal, not to destroy but to conserve. However,.....a new order consisting of the followers of Guru Nanak gradually came into being.<sup>89</sup>

Sikhism, we are told, 'had its origin in an unostentatious attempt at social emancipation and religious uplift'.<sup>90</sup> This movement with a

limited objective broadened into a full-fledged faith after Guru Nanak's death in circumstances which were not foreseen in his time.

Apart from the radical differences between Hinduism and the teachings of Guru Nanak, including his rejection of the Vedas as the basis of revealed Truth, there are two highly significant facts of which this view does not take proper account. The establishment of *Sangats* and the nomination of a successor by Guru Nanak clearly indicate his intention of giving his followers an organisational solidarity which could not but draw a line of clear distinction between them and the Hindus. The foundations were well and truly laid. That the *Sangat* system continued to develop and extend is clear enough from what we know about the pontificate of Guru Arjan. There was no analogous development either in the fold of orthodox Hinduism or in any of the sects founded by the *bhagats*. Again, while Guru Nanak's concept of Guruship took a firm hold of the Sikh community and assured the continuity of centralised spiritual leadership, the multiplication of Gurus became a potent factor of disintegration among the other sects, such as the Ramanandis, the Kabirpanthis and the Bengal Vaishnavas. Neither the *Sangat* system nor the new concept of Guruship could be described as an accident; the developments which followed were quite implicit in Guru Nanak's work.

In another respect Guru Nanak proved to be a true founder. His teachings, unabridged and unaltered, form the basis of Sikhism even five centuries after his birth. His successors added explanatory and supplementary touches, but modification of the original was unthinkable. Ram Rai forfeited his claim to succeed Guru Har Rai because he had altered a single word in one of Guru Nanak's verses to save himself from the wrath of Aurangzeb. This was considered as an inexcusable sacrilege. The Guru's words are immutable.

In Brahminical Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism generations of teachers and commentators gave new shapes to religious and philosophical doctrines and sometimes changed them beyond recognition. The six schools of Hindu philosophy branched off into different groups of thinkers. The same process divided Buddhists

and Jains into different and sometimes warring sects. The history of Islam as also of Christianity presents the same phenomenon of doctrinal disintegration. But Sikhism never succumbed to warring commentators; it preserved in tact the heritage which Guru Nanak had left for it. None but a great and far-sighted founder can formulate doctrines capable of surviving the shocks of political and social revolutions for centuries.

One might raise the question whether the creation of the *Khalsa* by Guru Gobind Singh was basically a deviation from the ideas and principles laid down by Guru Nanak. It is too big a question to be discussed here, but attention might be drawn to some salient points which require fresh emphasis because Guru Gobind Singh has been held responsible for 'dwarfing of the unity of a religious sect into an instrument of political advancement'.

Doubts about the militarisation of the peaceful *Panth* do not reflect merely a phase of modern historical assessment. The issue can be traced back to the days of Guru Hargobind who took the first steps towards developing a policy of armed self-defence against Mughal persecution. There was within the Sikh community itself some psychological hostility to what appeared to be a trend towards new developments in the *Panth*. On this point our authority is no less a person than Bhai Gurdas.<sup>91</sup>

People say the former Gurus used to sit in the temple; the present Guru remaineth not in any one place.

\* \* \* \*

The former Gurus sitting on their thrones used to console the Sikhs; the present Guru keepeth dogs and hunteth.

The former Gurus used to compose hymns, listen to them, and sing them; the present Guru composeth not hymns, or listeneth to them, or singeth them.

He keepeth not his Sikh followers with him, but taketh enemies of his faith and wicked persons as his guides and familiars.

The ordinary Sikh might be puzzled and confused by such unfamiliar sights, but the veteran devotee penetrated into the Guru's mystery although discretion sealed his lips.

I say, the truth within him cannot possibly be concealed; the true Sikhs like the bumble-bees are enamoured of his lotus

feet.

He supporteth a burden intolerable to others and asserteth not himself.

It is obvious that Mughal persecution was the 'burden intolerable to others' which Guru Hargobind was called upon to 'support'. The burden became much heavier during the pontificate of Guru Gobind Singh. He thought it necessary to 'assert himself'. The result was the creation of the *Khalsa*. In making explicit what Guru Hargobind had kept implicit the tenth Guru was careful enough not to give up the essentials of the founder's teachings. Indeed, in his compositions we find 'the same insistence on the worship of the One True Lord, the same idealisation of devotion and surrender, and the same glorification of the Name', as we find in Guru Nanak's hymns. The core of Sikhism remained unaffected by the political turmoil through which its votaries passed under his leadership. Indeed, he reminds them that without worshipping the *Name* of God one can attain only transient political and military success. Speaking about powerful rulers he says :

Though they roamed and conquered all countries beating their various drums;

\* \* \* \*

Yet without worshipping the Name of God the Lord of wealth, they went at last to their final home.<sup>92</sup>

The apparent deviations introduced by Guru Gobind Singh are two : abolition of Guruship and militarisation of the community. The first is a logical development of the idea that the Guruship is an impersonal principle : it means the transmission of Light in a mystical manner for the spiritual guidance of the community. What Guru Gobind Singh does is to separate it altogether from its association with a mortal human being and to vest it in the immortal *Granth*. The Light remains; its human frame disappears. A compact brotherhood of faith will now seek spiritual guidance from the *Word* of the Guru through the Holy Book.

The idea behind militarisation is clearly expressed in Guru Gobind Singh's own words :

Blest is his life in this world who repeateth

God's name with his mouth and meditateth war in his heart.

\* \* \* \*

Take the broom of divine knowledge into thy hand, and sweep away the filth of timidity.<sup>93</sup>

This warning against sinking into the 'filth of timidity' is quite in consonance with Guru Nanak's teaching; so is the injunction to use 'divine knowledge' as the weapon to clear away the 'filth'. God, he says, is 'without fear and without hate' (*Mul Mantra*). Those who love the Fearless should be fearless too :

He who is imbued with the fear of the Lord becometh fearless,  
for one becometh like the one one serveth!<sup>94</sup>

The only fear which Guru Nanak recommends is the fear of God;

Without the fear of God none can cross to the other shore,  
Fear of God preserves man's love of God.  
Fear of God burns away lesser fears within the body.....<sup>95</sup>

In Guru Nanak's days, as also in the days of his three immediate successors, the State was not hostile to the Sikhs as such, although they suffered from the general disabilities which pressed heavily on all non-Muslims. The Sikhs even benefited from the liberality of Akbar. There was no direct occasion for the Gurus to call upon the Sikhs to 'repeat God's name with their mouths and meditate war in their hearts'. Nor was the newly formed community morally and spiritually prepared for the terrible sacrifices which war with the Mughals was certain to involve. The changed policy of the State in the seventeenth century underlined the need for a change in the Sikh way of life without in any manner deviating from the principles of the faith. The defence of the faith against the repeated onslaughts of the State demanded resort to arms. By that time moral and spiritual preparations had made considerable progress; under the spiritual and temporal leadership provided by successive Gurus the fear of God had burnt away lesser fears within the body of the Sikh community. The Sikhs felt that they had become capable of responding to Guru Nanak's never-forgotten call for fearlessness.

Guru Gobind Singh recognised this feeling, strengthened it, and gave it institutional expression. His father had shown how a fearless Sikh could make the supreme sacrifice for his faith. Several decades

earlier the fifth Guru had shown a similar example. It was now for the disciples to come forward and prove that their Gurus had not died in vain. In giving them direction and leadership Guru Gobind Singh responded to call of history in a manner which was not at all inconsistent with the essence of Guru Nanak's teachings. On the other hand, one might say that the tenth Guru's call evoked splendid response because the twin foundations of the new system—spiritual fervour and freedom from fear—emanated directly from the founder's teachings. From this point of view the emergence of the *Khalsa* was the fulfilment of Guru Nanak's mission.

Another view—more or less popular for reasons which are not strictly historical—is that Guru Nanak's religion is a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam. In view of what has been said above regarding the impact of Islam on his teachings the question of synthesis does not really arise. McLeod says : "It is indeed a synthesis, but one in which Islamic elements are relatively unimportant".<sup>96</sup> Not a single cardinal principle of Sikhism can be traced directly and unequivocally either to orthodox Islam or to Sufism. Similarity in respect of some minor elements need not be treated as synthesis; there could be no real absorption of Islamic elements without acceptance of their Quranic foundation as also of the position of the Prophet.

A corollary to the above view is thus stated by Tara Chand : "The mission of Nanak was the unification of the Hindu and the Musulman".<sup>97</sup> In the *Janam-sakhi* version of the mission entrusted to him by God there is no reference to Hindus or Muslims or to the unification of the two religious communities. He was directed to 'go into the world to pray and teach mankind how to pray'.<sup>98</sup> Nowhere in his teachings does he ask either Hindus or Muslims to give up their faith and embrace another. What he insists upon is scrupulous adherence to the essentials of their respective religions, involving the rejection of conventional rituals and personal vices such as greed.

The following is an admonition to a Brahmin :

O Brahman, so meditate on God  
That His name may become thy purification,

His name thy learning, and His name thy wisdom and good acts.

The sacrificial thread is only on thy body as long as thou hast life.

Make the remembrance of the Name thy loin-cloth and frontal mark,

And it shall abide with thee in this world and the next.<sup>99</sup>

This is Guru's advice regarding the five prayers prescribed for a Muslim :

First, be truthful.

Second, take only what is your due.

Third, give alms in the name of Allah.

Fourth, make your intentions pure,

Fifth, let your voice rise in the praise of God.

Let good acts be your creed.

Then proclaim you are a Muslim.<sup>100</sup>

The Guru insists upon the fundamentals of faith and conduct but does not preach the message of communal unity. Such unity would, of course, emerge if both Hindus and Muslims honestly adhered to the fundamentals; but it would be too far-fetched to assume that Guru Nanak aimed at bringing about Hindu-Muslim unity in such an indirect manner. Had he acted with any such positive aim in view he would most probably have made a frontal attack on the problem. He might have thought that time and circumstances were into favourable to Hindu-Muslim unity.

Guru Nanak began his missionary career with the significant utterance : "There is no Hindu and no Musulman". What he actually meant is not quite clear. Macauliffe says : "The Sikhs interpret this to mean generally that both Hindus and Muhammadans had forgotten the precepts of their religions".<sup>101</sup> This interpretation is quite consistent with the general tenor of Guru Nanak's teachings. He is never tired of speaking about the lapses of Hindus and Muslims alike. His attack is directed against rituals, conventions and moral lapses. He emphasizes the point that people take 'those things as *ends* in themselves which were originally intended only as *means*'.<sup>102</sup> Thus his utterance seems to have a direct reference to the actual socio-religious conditions prevailing in the Punjab in his days. It



would hardly be wrong to take it as a setting for the liberation of human souls which he accepts as his God-given task.

It is, however, possible to give the utterance a more comprehensive and somewhat idealistic interpretation.<sup>103</sup> All human beings belong to a common category irrespective of differences in religious affiliation; a man is primarily a *man*, not a Hindu or a Musalman. Here is an emphasis on the fundamental unity of mankind overriding religious and social differences which are artificial and meaningless from the catholic point of view. This interpretation would be quite consistent with Guru Nanak's point of view. He says :

Under the Guru's instruction regard all men as equal, since God's light is contained in the heart of each.<sup>104</sup>

Castes and names seeking to separate man from man are 'folly', for

All creatures have one shelter, that of God.<sup>105</sup>

The unity of mankind might have been uppermost in the mind of Guru Nanak immediately after his first great mystic experience at Sultanpur. That was a very appropriate moment for his soul to soar above the sordid realities of his environment and look at man as a prayerful being seeking shelter from the Lord. The lofty spiritual view implied in this interpretation cannot be brought down to the level of a mundane programme for Hindu-Muslim unity.

The impression which Guru Nanak made upon his contemporaries, as also upon successive generations of Sikhs and others, was one of gentleness, love, and fellow-feeling. We have seen how, more than three centuries after his death, Surendranath Banerjee spoke of him as 'the meek, the gentle, the blessed' Nanak. Malcolm pays a tribute to him as a preacher of Truth :

And we cannot have a more convincing proof of.....the inoffensive light in which it (*i.e.* his doctrine) was viewed, than the knowledge that its success did not rouse the bigotry of the intolerant and tyrannical Muhammedan government under which he lived.<sup>106</sup>

Writing towards the close of the eighteenth century Crauford referred to his 'great reputation for knowledge, wisdom and piety'.<sup>107</sup>

Forster speaks of his 'commanding elocution' and 'calm passive fortitude'.<sup>108</sup>

The reference to 'commanding elocution' is very significant. Gentle persuasion was Guru Nanak's sole weapon; he was not an angry debator or rude campaigner. His missionary work was viewed by all in an 'inoffensive light'. Even the acceptance of Muslim disciples<sup>109</sup> did not expose him to persecution by the Muslim State. He never used miracles to demonstrate his supernatural power or to make an impression upon the credulous people of his age. He 'attempted to overcome all obstacles', says Malcolm, 'by the force of reason and humanity'.<sup>110</sup>

His 'humanity' is transparent in his verses. More than once he calls himself a 'poet'.<sup>111</sup> A poet, indeed, he was. He gives us sublime religious poetry in the *Japji*. In the *Baburvani* we have the agony of suffering sublimated in saintly submission to the incomprehensible Will of God. In the *Bara Mah* soft sensitiveness to the beauty of nature is intermingled with the noblest manifestation of love, the love of God.

There were poets among the *bhagats*, but Guru Nanak excels them all as a literary artist and as an architect of language. Kabir was a poet of high merit, but he was fortunate in having as vehicle a language (Hindi) which had already attained a literary status and was capable of expressing subtle ideas in verse. In the days of Guru Nanak the Punjabi language was in its infancy : it had no literature and even its alphabet was imperfect. With his high literary gifts Guru Nanak uses this undeveloped language as a medium for expression of abstract spiritual ideas in poetic form with musical effect. He laid an example and initiated a tradition. Two of his successors, Guru Arjan and Guru Gobind Singh, were poets of a high order. Guru Nanak founded a religion as also a literature; the two grew side by side. Religion provided inspiration for literature; literature brought religion to the home and heart of the common man.

The story of Guru Nanak's life and achievement has no parallel in the annals of this ancient land. It is not enough to call him 'the

greatest of the sons of the Punjab'.<sup>112</sup> He must be counted among the greatest of the sons of India. He was the founder of the last of the great religions of the world. He planted a poetical sapling which has blossomed into one of the great literatures of India. He laid the foundations of a brotherhood which has enriched our national heritage by struggle against religious intolerance, social injustice, and denial of political freedom. History must pay its homage to one who—in serving God—served his country so well.

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2. Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, I, 170.
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4. Briggs, I, 481.
5. Timur's autobiographical memoir, *Malfuzat-i-Timuri* or *Tuzuk-i-Timuri* (Elliot and Dowson, III, 389-477).
6. *Zafar Namah* (Habib and Nizami, 120).
7. K. S. Lal (*Twilight of the Sultanate*, 319-320) reduces the number to 50,000. For plea of military necessity see R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History and Culture of the Indian People*, VI, 123.
8. *Zafar Namah* (Habib and Nizami, 123).
9. Thomas, *Chronicles of the Pathan Kings of Delhi*, 330.
10. *Tarikh-i Mubarak Shahi* (Elliot and Dowson, IV, 54, 56).
11. Habib and Nizami, 653.
12. *Tarikh-i Mubarak Shahi* (Elliot and Dowson, IV, 54).
13. *Waq'at-i Mushtaki* (Elliot and Dowson, IV, 448).
14. Habib and Nizami, 664.
15. Mrs. Beveridge (tr.), *Babur-Nama*, I, 383.
16. The Roh country extended roughly from Swat and Bajaur to Bhakkar and from Hasan Abdal to Kabul and Kandahar.
17. Elliot and Dowson, IV, 306-307. See Habib and Nizami, 680.
18. *The Agrarian System of Moslem India*, 67-68, 71.
19. R. C. Majumdar, 142.
20. Elliot and Dowson, IV, 447, 448, 450, 453.
21. Briggs, I, 590.
22. *Agrarian System*, 71.
23. Macauliffe, I, 232.
24. Trilochan Singh and others, *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, 86. Bhai Gurdas (*Var I*, 30) speaks of bribe taking by Qazis. See Ganda Singh (ed.), *The Panjab Past and Present*, Guru Nanak Quincentenary Volume, 36.
25. Elliot and Dowson, IV, 445.
26. Briggs, I, 585, 586.
27. Elliot and Dowson, IV, 476.
28. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, I, 4.

29. *Agrarian System*, 68-69.
30. *History of India under Babar and Humayun*, I, 406.
31. *Agrarian System*, 160.
32. Mrs. Beveridge, I, 380.
33. *Ibid.*, 370.
34. Rushbrook Williams, *An Empire-BUILDER of the Sixteenth Century*, 113.
35. Mrs. Beveridge, I, 383.
36. *Ibid.*
37. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 5.
38. Ganda Singh, *Nanak Panthis*, 4.
39. Elliot and Dowson, V, 23.
40. *Mirat-i Sikandari* (Bayley, *Local Muhammadan Dynasties of Gujarat* 277).
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43. S. A. A. Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India*, 13.
44. Barani, text, 41-44 (Habib, *Political Theory of Delhi Sultanate*, 137-138).
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48. Moreland, *Agrarian System*, 224.
49. Elliot and Dowson, III, 380-381, 386.
50. *Ibid.*, IV, 439-440.
51. *Ibid.*, IV, 578, 581, 447. Briggs, I, 586.
52. Elliot and Dowson, IV, 464-465. *Tabaqat-i Akbari*, text, I, 322-323.
53. Macauliffe, VI, 132-134.
54. Teja Singh, *The Growth of Responsibility in Sikhism*, 2.
55. *Japji*, 38. (Khushwant Singh, *Hymns of Guru Nanak*, 51).
56. Macauliffe, I, 235.
57. See Bhai Gurdas, Var I, 20-27.
58. *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER II

1. Carpenter, *Theism in Medieval India*, 228, 236, 253.
2. *Katha*, 1,2, 23. *Mundaka*, III, 2, 3. *Sacred Books of the East*, XV, 11, 40.
3. *Gita*, XI, 53-54 (tr. Barnett).
4. *Gita* XVIII, 66. (R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History and Culture of the Indian People*, VI, 550.
5. *Gita*, IX, 32.
6. *Mahabharata*, XII, 335-352 (Narayaniya Section).
7. *Vishnu Purana*, VI, 8, 21 (Wilson, V, 247).
8. *Bhagavata Purana*, XI, 14, 19.
9. *Ibid.*, IV, 9, 17.
10. *Ibid.*, VII, 9, 23-24.

11. *Ibid.*, XI, 3, 32.
12. *Ibid.*, XI, 17, 27.
13. *Ibid.*, VII, 9, 9-10.
14. Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, 134.
15. *Bhagavata Purana*, XI, 10, 1.
16. *Ibid.*, XI, 11, 34-47.
17. Govindacharya, *The Divine Wisdom of the Dravidian Saints*, 65.
18. Nityanusandhanam Series, Book 2 (Andal).
19. Kingsbury and Phillips, *Hymns of Tamil Saivite Saints*, 65.
20. *Ibid.*, 127.
21. Pope, *Manikka Vasahar*, XXXVI.
22. Sturrock, *South Kanara* (Madras District Manuals), 180.
23. Innes, *Gazetteer of Malabar and Anjengo*, 436.
24. Logan, *Malabar*, I, 245.
25. Tara Chand (107) thinks that "the circumstance of his practical excommunication with all his family by the Brahmans, and his seeking a Nayar's aid in performing the rites of the dead on the demise of his mother" indicate Sankara's contact with the Muslims. The assumption seems to be far-fetched.
26. Fawcett wrote : "He (Sankara) was born at Kaladi near the Eluvayi river when the country was in peril. Her King had been converted to Islam, and that religion was gaining ground. Brahmanism must be revived, so *Siva* was re-incarnated in the child of a widow". (Quoted in Tara Chand, 107). Such legends might reflect popular beliefs, but obviously they have no concrete historical meaning.
27. *Influence of Islam*, 111.
28. *Theism in Medieval India*, 390.
29. For instance, Weber (*Indian Antiquary*, III, 21, 47), Logan (*Malabar*), Caldwell (*Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages*), Hopkins (*India Old and New*).
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33. *Adi Lila*, I, 1, 26.
34. *Bhagavata Purana*, XI, 17, 27.
35. Macauliffe, VI, 102-103.
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43. Macauliffe, VI, 104.
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46. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, I, 23.
47. *Rise of the Maratha Power*, 50-51, 146.
48. Macauliffe, VI, 39-40.
49. *Ibid.*, 41.
50. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 151-157, 245.
51. Macauliffe, VI, 126.
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54. *Dabistan* (tr. Troyer and Shea), I, 186.
55. *Bijak*, Ramaini, 77.
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57. McLeod, 156.
58. Westcott, *Kabir and the Kabirpanth*, 28, 48.
59. *Ibid.*, 20.
60. McLeod, 155.
61. R. C. Majumdar, 562.
62. Westcott, 77.
63. Tara Chand, 165.
64. *Ibid.*
65. Macauliffe, VI, 132.
66. *Ibid.*, 137-138. According to Hindu belief death at Magahar entailed rebirth as an ass, whereas death at Banaras brought salvation.
67. R. C. Majumdar, 565.
68. *Kabir*, 75.
69. Macauliffe, VI, 110, 119, 122, 328.
70. *Ibid.*, 79, 81.
71. *Ibid.*, 82-83.
72. *Ibid.*, 86.
73. *Ibid.*, 88, 92, 93.
74. *Ibid.*, 417-420.
75. *Ibid.*, 357, 394, 396.
76. *Ibid.*, 414-416.
77. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Calcutta Session, 1939, 762-764. *Panjab Past and Present*, Guru Nanak Quincentenary Volume (ed. Ganda Singh), 334-339.
78. Macauliffe, VI, 42, 51, 54, 58.
79. *Ibid.*, 106.
80. The meeting is said to have taken place in 1496. (Westcott, *Kabir*, 2).
81. *Guru Nanak*, 56, 85-86.
82. The English translation of Kabir's verses covers 175 pages of Macauliffe's book.

83. Macauliffe, VI, 145, 146, 152, 163, 202, 215, 238, 258.
84. *Ibid.*, I, 38.
85. *Cultural Heritage of India* (published by Ramakrishna Mission), II, 254.
86. Westcott, 66.
87. Kabirpanthis belonging to the lowest castes are not allowed to wear *kanthis* (Westcott, *Kabir*, 73).
88. Macauliffe, VI, 16-17.
89. *Ibid.*, 10.
90. R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History of Bengal* (published by Dacca University), I, 367-368.
91. Macauliffe, VI, 8-12.
92. McLeod, 224.
93. Sir J. N. Sarkar, *Chaitanya*, 278-281.
94. *Bhagavata Purana*, 1, 3, 28. *Chaitanya-Charitamrita*, Adi Lila.
95. Tara Chand (219) says erroneously that Rupa and his brother Sanatana were Muslims.
96. "It is curious that, intimately connected as the Khatrias always have been and still are with the Sikh religion, only 9 per cent of them should belong to it." (*Glossary of the Punjab Tribes and Castes*, II, 507).
97. The position of these *Gurus* was, of course, entirely different from that of the Guru in Sikhism.
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99. *Ibid.*, 129.
100. *Ibid.*, 26.
101. Macauliffe, VI, 1.
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103. *Ibid.*, II, 124. See *Anand*, xxiv.
104. *Ibid.*, III, 61.
105. *Ibid.*, 60-61.
106. *Ibid.*, I, Preface, xxxii.
107. *Evolution of the Khalsa*, I, 133-134.
108. Khushwant Singh, 309.
109. Macauliffe, VI, 1.

### CHAPTER III

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2. Among them was the family of the poet Amir Khusrau who was born in India, probably in 1253.
3. S. A. A. Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India*, 8.
4. Qureshi, *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi*, 173.
5. *The Cambridge History of India*, III, 568.
6. Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan*, xxvi-xxvii.



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8. Macauliffe, VI, 263.
9. *Ibid.*, I, 176.
10. In Bengal, for instance, see R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *History and Culture of the Indian People*, VI, 638.
11. Ashraf, 91.
12. *Ibid.*, 54.
13. See Ashraf, 123.
14. Ashraf, 82.
15. Macauliffe, I, 278, 381.
16. *Ibid.*, VI, 146.
17. "Why wert thou born of woman? The Brahmans are supposed to have issued from Brahma's mouth."
18. Macauliffe, VI, 146.
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31. Browne, *Persian Literature under the Tartar Dominion*, 107.
32. See 'Amir Khusrau and Early Indo-Persian Literature' in A. C. Banerjee, *Medieval Studies*.
33. R. C. Majumdar, 541.
34. *Ibid.*, 539.
35. Ashraf, 71.
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37. Ashraf, 70.
38. *Ibid.*, 72.
39. *Ibid.*, 73.
40. Macauliffe, I, 36.
41. *Ibid.*, 238.
42. *Ibid.*, 372-373.
43. Khushwant Singh, *Hymns of Guru Nanak*, 97, 98.
44. Macauliffe, I, 169.
45. *Ibid.*, 133, 151, 165, 174.

46. *Ibid.*, 58.  
Rizvi, 29.  
J. A. Subhan, *Sufism, Its Saints and Shrines*, 320-321.
47. Macauliffe, VI, 394.
48. Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, 63.
49. *A khanaqah* usually maintained a *langar*.
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51. J. A. Subhan, 67.
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53. Badauni, text (Bib. Ind.), I, 130. Firishta, Lucknow text, I, 79.
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55. Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India*, 3-4.
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57. Khushwant Singh, *A History of The Sikhs*, I, 26-27. See also : Yusuf Hussain, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture*, 37; K. A. Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century* (76-77, 184) and *The Life and Times of Shaikh Farid-ud-din Ganj-i-Shakar* (107).
58. Rizvi, *Muslim Revivalist Movements in Northern India*, 13, 16, 18-20. Also 'Indian Sufism and Guru Nanak'.
59. Rizvi, 'Indian Sufism and Guru Nanak'.
60. *Ibid.*
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62. *Siri Raga Ast.* 17 (3); *Var Majh*, slok 1 of pauri 13; *Gauri Ast.* 14 (7).
63. Macauliffe, VI, 401-402.
64. *Ibid.*, I, 40.
65. *Ibid.*, 84-92.
66. S. S. Kohli, 248.
67. Macauliffe, I, 150-152.
68. *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, 61.
69. Mrs. Rhys Davids, quoted in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, III, 83.
70. Macauliffe, I, 54.
71. Guru Nanak refers to *Nath* in *Solaha, Rag Maru*.
72. All Jogis did not split their ears.
73. *A Nath* is according to Macauliffe (I, 165), "a superior of Jogis".
74. Macauliffe, I, 60.
75. *Ibid.*, 41.
76. See Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Jogis*, 1, 10, 11, 13, 23, 67, 274.
77. Macauliffe, I, 349.
78. *Ibid.*, 350.
79. *Ibid.*, 222.
80. *Hymns of Guru Nanak*, 57.
81. Briggs, 67.
82. Alberuni, I, 69.

83. *Dabistan*, (tr. Troyer and Shea), II, 129.
84. Briggs, 125, 136, 150, 152, 159.
85. *Ibid.*, 26, 27, 39, 201.
86. Macauliffe, I, 356.
87. *Ibid.*, 351.
88. Also known as Tilla Balgundai and Gorakh Tilla. Babur is said to have assaulted it, probably on his way towards Panipat in 1525. The monastery is said to have been destroyed by Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1748; it was rebuilt later by a Hindu prince named Raja Man.
89. At Sultanpur there is a temple said to have been founded by Guga, a Rajput who later embraced Islam.
90. Briggs, 34, 136, 201.
91. Macauliffe, I, 59.
92. Briggs, 237.
93. This verse occurs in Bannu's *Adi Granth* (Macauliffe, I, 41).
94. Briggs, 228, 250.
95. For an elaborate exposition of the philosophical basis of Gorakhnath's teachings, see A. K. Banerjee, *Philosophy of Gorakhnath*.
96. *Hymns of Guru Nanak*.
97. *Var I*, 17-22.
98. *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, 75.
99. *Ibid.*, 82.
100. Macauliffe, I, Introduction, xli.
101. *Gita*, IV, 6-9 (tr. Barnett).
102. *Var I*, 23, 27.

#### CHAPTER IV

1. Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, 4-5.
2. Tr. Ganda Singh, in *The Panjab Past and Present*, Guru Nanak Birth Quincentenary Volume (ed. Ganda Singh), 45-53.
3. Indubhusan Banerjee, *Evolution of the Khalsa*, I, 63.
4. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, I, 299.  
McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 5.
5. Ganda Singh, in *The Panjab Past and Present*, 12.
6. Archer, *The Sikhs*, 57.
7. McLeod, 6.
8. *The Panjab Past and Present*, 30 (From *Bachittar Natak*, tr. Ganda Singh).
9. *Var I*, 23-45; XI, 13-14; XXIV, 1-4; XXV, 16, 26, 30-31.  
See *The Panjab Past and Present*, 32-44 (tr. McLeod)
10. Macauliffe, I, Introduction lxxiii.
11. See Khushwant Singh, 310-312. McLeod (14) says that Bhai Gurdas died in 1637. Macauliffe's date is 1629.
12. According to Khushwant Singh, the 40th *Var* in the current collection was

written by a Sindhi poet named Gurdas who was born long after the death of Bhai Gurdas.

13. Macauliffe, III, 63, 64.
14. *Ibid.*, I, Introduction, lxxiii.
15. *Ibid.*, lxxiv.
16. Khushwant Singh, 312.
17. *Ibid.*, 301.
18. J. Banerjee, 54-56; McLeod, 29-30.
19. *The Panjab Past and Present*, 39, (tr. McLeod).
20. *Ibid.*, 42.
21. Macauliffe, 17.
22. Malcolm, 17.
23. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs* (1849), 54.
24. McLeod (29) says that in regard to the Mount Sumeru, Mecca, and Achal Batala incidents "Bhai Gurdas's account contains almost as many miraculous or otherwise unacceptable details as the *Puratan* version and, in one instance, more than that of the *Miharban Janam-sakhi*".
25. Khushwant Singh, 299.
26. The manuscript was donated to the East India House Library by H. T. Colebrooke and was sometimes known by his name.
27. This manuscript was edited by Macauliffe. In McLeod's view (17) it was closer to the common source than the *Vilayat Vali* manuscript.
28. Trumpp, *Adi Granth*, Introduction, ii.
29. Macauliffe, I, Introduction, lxxvii.
30. McLeod, 16-17.
31. The name of Sewa Das is not mentioned in the *Hafizabad Vali* version edited by Macauliffe. He attributed the authorship to Sewa Das on the basis of information supplied by Sir Atar Singh, Chief of Bhadaur. (Macauliffe, I, Introduction, lxxxvi, McLeod, 17).
32. *Puratan Janam-sakhi* compiled by Bhai Vir Singh is based on the two versions.
33. Trumpp, v; Macauliffe, I, Introduction, lxxviii-lxxix.
34. *The Panjab Past and Present*, 18-19.
35. Khushwant Singh, 300.
36. McLeod, 23; Macauliffe, I, Introduction, lxxx-lxxxii.  
The Hindalis (or Handalis) were a schismatic sect of the Sikhs, founded by Bidhi Chand, a Sikh priest, who became an outcaste for marrying a Muslim woman. "He devised a religion of his own, and compiled a Granth and a Janam-sakhi to correspond. In both he sought to exalt to the rank of chief apostle his father Handal and degrade Guru Nanak.....". The active hostility of the Hindalis to the orthodox Sikhs continued till the eighteenth century; they supported Ahmad Shah Abdali.
37. Guru Ram Das stigmatised Prithi Chand as *Mina* or deceitful, a name given to a robber tribe in Rajputana. Prithi Chand's followers came to be known as Minas. (Macauliffe, I, Introduction, lxxx).

38. Macauliffe, I, Introduction, lxxx.
39. McLeod, 19. Writing before 1940, I. Banerjee (58) referred to this reported existence of Miharban's *Janam-sakhi* and observed : "..... a no details are vouchsafed we refrain from any comment on the matter".
40. McLeod, 20.
41. McLeod, in *The Panjab Past and Present*, 54. For McLeod's translation of extracts from *Mahima Prakas Varatak*, see *The Panjab Past and Present*, 59-87.
42. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 68-70.
43. According to Ganda Singh, the name of the author was Zulfiqar Adistani Azur Sasani; he was popularly known as Maubid and is wrongly mentioned as Mohsin Fani. (*The Panjab Past and Present*, 11).
44. I. Banerjee, 61.
45. Incorporated in his *Indian Tracts* (1788).
46. Incorporated in his *A Journey from Bengal to England* (1798).
47. Malcolm, 1-3.
48. Macauliffe, I, Introduction, vii, xvi.
49. I, Banerjee, 57.
50. Trilochan Singh (*Guru Nanak*, 3, 489-491) holds that the correct date is 20 October 1469 (*Katik Puranmasi*, 1526).
51. Macauliffe, I, Introduction, lxxxiv-lxxxvi.
52. McLeod, 94-95.
53. Ganda Singh, in *The Panjab Past and Present*, 17.
54. Khushwant Singh, 30.  
Ganda Singh, in *The Panjab Past and Present*, 18.
55. For the *patti* in *Rag Asa*, see Macauliffe I, 3-8.
56. Macauliffe, I, 8.
57. Persian became the official language in the Punjab in the reign of Akbar; in the days of the Lodis the official language was Hindi. (Narang, *Transformation of Sikhism*, 10).
58. See Macauliffe, I, 12-15. "This composition is not found in the Granth Sahib. Some Sikhs deny that it is the composition of Guru Nanak".
59. Macauliffe, I, 9-10.
60. *Ibid.*, 12.
61. Later recensions of *Bala Janam-sakhi* (*The Panjab Past and Present*, 19).
62. *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*.
63. *Panth Prakas*. (Narang, *Transformation of Sikhism*, 10).
64. Macauliffe, I, 33.
65. Cunningham, 41.
66. Macauliffe, I, 16.
67. *Ibid.*, Introduction, lxxxvii.
68. *Ibid.*, 20.
69. *Ibid.*, 21.
70. *Ibid.*, 23.

71. *Ibid.*, 28.
72. *Punjab State Gazetteers* (Kapurthala State), XIVA, 45; Mrs. Beveridge (*Babur-nama*, I, 442, II, 462) attributes the foundation to Daulat Khan Lodi. Sultanpur is now a small, dilapidated town in the Kapurthala district (Punjab).
73. Macauliffe, I, 18.
74. Trumpp, xi, *Cf.* Khushwant Singh, 31.
75. Khushwant Singh, 31. An elaborate version of Nanak's dialogue with the Supreme Being is found in *Ganjnama* by Bhai Nand Lal who was Guru Gobind Singh's court poet. For English version, see Trilochan Singh, *Guru Nanak*, 68-70.
76. Macauliffe, I, 34-36.
77. McLeod, 107.
78. I. Banerjee, 70.
79. *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, 270.
80. Macauliffe, I, 38-41.
81. I. Banerjee, 74.
82. *Tr.* McLeod, in *The Panjab Past and Present*, 44.
83. Macauliffe, I, 42-43; Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, I, 4.
84. Macauliffe, I, 29.
85. McLeod, 108-109, 67; Khushwant Singh, 33; Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, I, 5. According to the Miharban *Janam-sakhi* Guru Nanak married in 1485, left Talwandi in 1504 and set out on his first *udasi* in 1506. Apart from the difficulty of connecting Daulat Khan Lodi's administration at Sultanpur with his period of service there, it is difficult to believe that all his journeys were completed within 14 years (1506-1520).
86. Macauliffe, I, 58.
87. *Ibid.*, 147.
88. *Ibid.*, 163.
89. *Ibid.*, 174.
90. *Ibid.*, 180.
91. *The Panjab Past and Present*, 33 (*tr.* McLeod).
92. *Ibid.*, 45 (*tr.* Ganda Singh).
93. *The Panjab Past and Present*, 34-35 (*tr.* McLeod).
94. *Var*, I, 24 (Trilochan Singh, *Guru Nanak*, 99).
95. Macauliffe, I, 43-44.
96. Macauliffe, I, 45-47; McLeod, 117-119.  
*Charanpahul* is also called *Charanamrit*. "This was a form of initiation by drinking the water in which the Guru's feet had been washed. The preamble of the Japji was read at the same time. The ceremony was inaugurated by Guru Nanak". (Macauliffe).
97. Macauliffe, I, 47-50. Visit to Kurukshetra is not mentioned in the *Puratan Janam-sakhi*.
98. I. Banerjee, 78-80.

99. Not mentioned in the Miharban *Janam-sakhi*.
100. Macauliffe, I, 52-56.
101. McLeod, 82.
102. Macauliffe, I, 56-57. This episode does not occur in the Miharban *Janam-sakhi*.
103. Macauliffe, I, 50-52. This incident finds no place in the *Puratan Janam-sakhi*.
104. McLeod, 90.
105. The *Gyan Ratnavali* and the Bala tradition speak of visits to Mount Govardhan, Mathura, and Brindaban; but the *Puratan* and Miharban *Janam-sakhis* are silent. Macauliffe (I, 57-58) accepts Brindaban. It is doubtful whether Brindaban was a well known holy place at this time. Its importance was revived by the Bengal Vaishnavas.
106. Macauliffe, I, 59-61. This visit is not mentioned in the Miharban *Janam-sakhi*. For location and importance of Nanakmata, see p. 94 in Chapter III.
107. This occurs in the Miharban *Janam-sakhi* only.
108. Macauliffe, I, 61-64.
109. See *The Panjab Past and Present*, 21.
110. Not one of these places is mentioned in the *Puratan Janam-sakhi*. For Gaya see Macauliffe, I, 64-65.
111. With the exception of Miharban.
112. Macauliffe, I, 73-78; McLeod, 110-112.
113. Sir J. N. Sarkar, (ed.), *History of Bengal* (Dacca University), II, 283.
114. A writer in *The Sikh Review* (June, 1964) says that the well was 'already there' when Guru Tegh Bahadur visited Dacca in 1667. No authority is quoted for this statement.
115. Macauliffe, I, 81.
116. Ganda Singh, in *The Panjab Past and Present*, 334-339.
117. Macauliffe, I, 81.
118. Khushwant Singh, *Hymns of Guru Nanak*, 158-159.
119. Macauliffe, I, 95-101.
120. *Ibid.*, 84-92, 101-106. Pak Pattan (formerly Ajothan) is in Montgomery district, now in Pakistan.
121. Macauliffe, I, 106-109.  
These places are in the Montgomery, Lahore, Amritsar and Kapurthala districts. Goindwal was then a village which had not acquired that name.
122. Gurdaspur district, Punjab.
123. Macauliffe, I, 109, 122-131.
124. *Ibid.*, 132-138; See McLeod, 138-140.
125. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, 9.
126. It is not certain whether this poem was composed at this stage of the Guru's life or during his last years, when he settled at Kartarpur after his travels. "It is believed to be amongst the last of the Guru's compositions". (Khushwant Singh, *Hymns of Guru Nanak*, 185).

127. Macauliffe, I, 147-154.
128. *Ibid.*, 146-147, 154-156; McLeod, 114-117; Kirpal Singh, in *Papers on Guru Nanak, Proceedings of Punjab History Conference, 1969*, 179-187.
129. "Guru Nanak and Ceylon", paper written by Dr. S. Karunaratana, Assistant Commissioner of Archaeology, Ceylon, and read at the International Seminar on Guru Nanak, Patiala, 1969.
130. McLeod, 57.
131. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, 9-10.
132. McLeod, 58-59.
133. Macauliffe, I, 157-163; McLeod, 141. Achal Batala is about 4 miles east of Batala in the Gurdaspur district, Punjab.
134. *The Panjab Past and Present*, 40-43 (tr. McLeod).
135. Macauliffe, I, 163-169.
136. See *The Panjab Past and Present*, 325-333.
137. Macauliffe, I, 169-171.
138. *The Panjab Past and Present*, 35-36 (tr. McLeod).
139. McLeod, 119-122.
140. Gorakhnath was a *Nath*, but Bhai Gurdas counts him among 84 *Sidhs*.
141. Macauliffe, I, 171-172; McLeod, 78. Hasan Abdal is a village in Attock district (Pakistan). This incident may also be placed after Guru Nanak's return from the West.
142. *The Panjab Past and Present*, 37-40. (tr. McLeod).
143. Trumpp, *Adi Granth*, vi.
144. Macauliffe, I, 174-180.
145. McLeod, 128-132.
146. *The Puratan Janam-sakhi* calls him Rukn-ud-din; McLeod (*The Panjab Past and Present*, 37) points out that Jivan is an Indian name. If it is a Hindu name, as it appears to be, McLeod's argument about 'the inherent improbability of a non-Muslim entering the city' (*Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 124) loses its force.
147. "Trust in external observances is a counterfeit devotion".
148. Ganda Singh, in *Papers on Guru Nanak (Proceedings of Punjab History Conference, 1969)*, 191-192. Bhai Gurdas says *makkaphiria*. Ganda Singh observes, "... in Panjabi, the verb *phirna* is not used exclusively for physical movement, but is also used for 'changing', or going back upon one's words".
149. Abdul Qadir Jilani, the founder of the Qadiri order of Sufis, spent many years in Baghdad and was known in India as the *Pir-i-piran*. He died in 1166. (J. A. Subhan, *Sufism : Its Saints and Shrines*, 178, 264). He was also known as Dastgir. Apparently Guru Nanak met his contemporary successor in Baghdad.
150. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, 12. Poem from Ananda Acharya's *Snow Birds* (1919), reprinted in *The Panjab Past and Present*, 344.
151. Harbans Singh, *Guru Nanak, and Origins of the Sikh Faith*, P. 227.



152. Modern Eminabad in Gujranwala district (Pakistan).
153. Mrs. Beveridge, *Babur-nama*, I, 429.
154. *Asa* 89, *Asa astapadi* 11-12, *Tilang* 5.
155. Macauliffe, I, 115.
156. *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, 88.
157. *Ibid.*, 87-88.
158. McLeod, 137.
159. *Ibid.*, 138.
160. Macauliffe, I, 111-114.
161. *Ibid.*, 110.
162. *Anahad sabad*: "unstruck music, music of the spheres; celestial symphony; divine music heard within the soul by the mystics". (*Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*).
163. See Jogendra Singh, *Sikh Ceremonies*, 59, 87.
164. *The Panjab Past and Present*, 40 (tr. McLeod).
165. *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*.
166. *The Panjab Past and Present*, 40 (tr. McLeod).
167. Macauliffe, I, 190.
168. McLeod, 99-101.
169. Macauliffe, I, 190.
170. Khushwant Singh, *Hymns of Guru Nanak*, 107.
171. Although the *Japji* was composed by Guru Nanak, the slok or epilogue is generally attributed to Guru Angad.
172. *Hymns of Guru Nanak*, 62.
173. Macauliffe, I, 190.

## CHAPTER V

1. Tr. Ganda Singh, in *The Panjab Past and Present*, Guru Nanak Birth Quincentenary Volume, 45-46.
2. Trumpp, *Adi Granth*, cv.  
Carpenter, *Theism in Medieval India*, 477-478.  
Farquhar, *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, 337.
3. Teja Singh, *Essay in Sikhism*, 10.
4. Macauliffe, I, 229.
5. Trilochan Singh, in *Sikhism*, published by the Punjabi University, Patiala, 43.
6. Khushwant Singh, *Hymns of Guru Nanak*, 43.
7. *Ibid.*, 59.
8. Macauliffe, I, 258.
9. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 164.
10. I, Banerjee, *Evolution of the Khalsa*, I, 277-280.  
McLeod, 160.

11. Macauliffe, I, 200, 213.  
Teja Singh, *The Japji*, 27-28, 45.
12. Khushwant Singh, 58.
13. Macauliffe, I, 198.
14. Khushwant Singh, 46.
15. McLeod, 166, 168.
16. *Ibid.*, 169.
17. *Jap.* Khushwant Singh, 44.
18. Khushwant Singh, 50-52.
19. *Ibid.*, 168.
20. *Ibid.*, 159.
21. Macauliffe, I, 362, 382.
22. From Banno's *Granth Sahib*; Macauliffe, I, 40.
23. Khushwant Singh, 47.
24. *Ibid.*, 44-45.
25. Macauliffe, I, Introduction, lxi.
26. *Ibid.*, 265.
27. McLeod, 174.
28. *Ibid.*, 169.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Khushwant Singh, 57.
31. Macauliffe, I, 267.
32. Khushwant Singh, 181.
33. Macauliffe, III, 253.
34. Darshan Singh, *The Religion of Guru Nanak*, 38.
35. McLeod, 165.
36. Khushwant Singh, 54.
37. McLeod, 207.
38. I. Banerjee, 109.
39. Macauliffe, I, 20.
40. *Katha*, II, 33.
41. McLeod, 196.
42. Teja Singh, *Asa di Var*, 126-127; *The Japji*, 77-79.
43. I. Banerjee, 107-236.
44. Macauliffe, II, 124.
45. *Ibid.*, III, 122.
46. *Ibid.*, II, 339; *Var IX*, I; XXIV, 25.
47. Khushwant Singh, 47-49.
48. Macauliffe, I, 262.
49. *Ibid.*, 135.
50. Khushwant Singh, 32.
51. *Sidh Gosh*t. Khushwant Singh, 32.
52. Khushwant Singh, 33.
53. Macauliffe, IV, 255.

54. Khushwant Singh, 33.
55. Macauliffe, II, 311.
56. I. Banerjee, 232.
57. Macauliffe, IV, 246, 248.
58. McLeod, 198-199.
59. Macauliffe, III, 197.
60. McLeod, 198.
61. Macauliffe, IV, 264.
62. *Ibid.*, V, 299-300.
63. *Ibid.*, II, 27.
64. *Coronation Ode*, Macauliffe, II, 26.
65. Macauliffe, II, 26.
66. *Ibid.*, I, 382.
67. *Ibid.*, II, 120.
68. *Ibid.*, 325.
69. *Ibid.*, IV, 245.
70. See Macauliffe, V, 91-92.
71. Khushwant Singh, 44-45.
72. McLeod, 201.
73. Macauliffe, I, 11.
74. *Ibid.*, 244.
75. *Ibid.*, 90.
76. *Ibid.*, 68, 87, 100.
77. I. Banerjee, 112.
78. McLeod, 202.
79. *Japji*, xxxvii (Khushwant Singh, 61).
80. *Japji*, iv.
81. Macauliffe, I, 227.
82. Trilochan Singh in *Sikhism*, Punjabi University, 70.
83. Macauliffe, I, 227.
84. *Ibid.*, 4.
85. *Ibid.*, II, 126.
86. *Ibid.*, I, 219.
87. Teja Singh, *Asa di Var*, 128.
88. Trilochan Singh, in *Sikhism*, Punjabi University, 70.
89. McLeod, 224.
90. Macauliffe, II, 348.
91. *Ibid.*, I, lxxv.
92. Khushwant Singh, 59-61.
93. Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, 176.  
S. S. Kohli, *A Critical Study of the Adi Granth*, 367.
94. McLeod, 221.
95. Macauliffe, I, 38, 52, 60, 237.
96. *Ibid.*, 50-51, 228-229, 370.

97. Khushwant Singh, 52.
98. Macauliffe, I, 28.
99. *Ibid.*, 336.
100. I. Banerjee, 137-141.
101. Macauliffe, I, 116.
102. Khushwant Singh, 53.
103. Macauliffe, I, 236.
104. *Ibid.*, 362.
105. *Ibid.*, 345.
106. *Ibid.*, 117.
107. *Ibid.*, 121.
108. *Ibid.*, 63, 76, 291.
109. *Ibid.*, 320, 145.
110. Jogendra Singh and Daljit Singh, *Guru Nanak*, 158.
111. Macauliffe, I, 57, 79.
112. S. S. Kohli, 360-361.
113. Macauliffe, I, 25, 84, 252.
114. *Ibid.*, 25.
115. McLeod, 218-219.
116. Macauliffe, I, 91, 316.
117. *Ibid.*, 60, 171.
118. *The Panjab Past and Present*, 40.  
Macauliffe, II, 9.
119. Macauliffe, I, 157.
120. Teja Singh, *Sikhism, Its Ideals and Institutions*, 6.
121. Macauliffe, I, 72, 136-137.
122. *Ibid.*, IV, 244.
123. *Ibid.*, I, 278, 283.
124. *Ibid.*, 28, 156, 233.
125. Carpenter, 403.
126. Macauliffe, V, 94.
127. *A Journey from Bengal to England*, 256.
128. Macauliffe, I, 522.
129. *Ibid.*, IV, 242, 243, 256, 260.

## CHAPTER VI

1. These lines appear on the title page of each volume of Macauliffe's book.
2. *Tr. McLeod, in The Panjab Past and Present, Guru Nanak Birth Quincentenary Volume, (ed. Ganda Singh), 33.*
3. *Tr. Harnam Singh Shan, Paper read at Guru Nanak Birth Quincentenary International Seminar, Patiala, 1969.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *The Panjab Past and Present, 27.*

6. Tr. Ganda Singh, in *The Panjab Past and Present*, 49.
7. Tr. McLeod in *The Panjab Past and Present*, 59.
8. Trilochan Singh and others, *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, 270.
9. Extracts quoted in *The Panjab Past and Present*, from Abbott, Godbole and Edwards, *Nectar from Indian Saints*, 191.
10. R. C. Majumdar, *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, X (II) : *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, 481-485.
11. Macauliffe, VI, I.
12. S. N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, I, 10-11.
13. Khushwant Singh, *Hymns of Guru Nanak*, 19.
14. S. S. Kohli, *A Critical Study of Adi Granth*, 259-260.
15. Macauliffe, I, 116.
16. Khushwant Singh, 70.  
S. S. Kohli, 265.
17. Khushwant Singh, 27-28, 43.
18. S. S. Kohli, 267.
19. Khushwant Singh, 121.
20. S. S. Kohli, 254-259.
21. I. Banerjee, *Evolution of the Khalsa*, I, 141.
22. See Bhai Gurdas, *Var*, XI.
23. For a contrary view see Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, I, 15.
24. Ganda Singh, in *The Panjab Past and Present*, 20-22.  
McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 155-158.
25. Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, 169.
26. Cunningham, 43.
27. *Ibid.*, 43-44.
28. Teja Singh, *Sikhism, Its Ideals and Institutions*, 10.
29. Macauliffe, VI, 326-331.
30. *Ibid.*, 336.
31. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, 211.
32. Macauliffe, I, 76, 103.  
Khushwant Singh, 79.
33. Macauliffe, VI, 148.
34. See McLeod, 132-138; Trilochan Singh, *Guru Nanak*, 403-417.
35. Macauliffe, I, 119.
36. *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, 88.
37. *Ibid.*, 88.
38. *Ibid.*, 86.
39. *Ibid.*, 97.
40. *Ibid.*, 87.
41. *Ibid.*, 88.
42. McLeod, 133-134.

43. Macauliffe, I, 122.
44. *Ibid.*, 107.
45. M'Gregor, 45.
46. Trumpp, *Adi Granth*, lxxvii.
47. Macauliffe, II, 27.
48. I. Banerjee, 233-234.
49. *Vars of Bhai Gurdas*, I, 45-48; III, 12; XX, 1; XXIV, 5-15 : XXVI, 31, 32.
50. *Tr. Ganda Singh*, in *The Panjab Past and Present*, 4-50.
51. Macauliffe, V, 294-295.
52. *Tr. Ganda Singh*, in *The Panjab Past and Present*, 23.
53. I. Banerjee, 77.
54. R. C. Majumdar, 604.
55. Teja Singh, *Guru Nanak and His Mission*, Part II, 1.
56. Khushwant Singh, 43.
57. Macauliffe, I, 61.
58. *Tr. McLeod*, in *The Panjab Past and Present*, 36.
59. *Ibid.*, 39.
60. Macauliffe, I, 150.
61. *Ibid.*, 158.
62. Greenless, *The Gospel of the Guru Granth Sahib*, xl.
63. *Theism in Medieval India*, 489.
64. *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, 10.
65. *Influence of Islam*, 169.
66. *The Panjab Past and Present*, 45. Troyer and Shea, II, 247-248.
67. I. Banerjee, 73.
68. Macauliffe, I, 54.
69. S. S. Kohli, 277.
70. Darshan Singh, *The Religion of Guru Nanak*, 18-20; See Tara Chand, 168.
71. *Tilang*, M. I. (Darshan Singh, 17).
72. Macauliffe, I, 121.
73. *Ibid.*, 123.
74. McLeod, 161.
75. Sher Singh, *Philosophy of Sikhism*.
76. *Holy Quran*, Sura xxvii, 2; Khushwant Singh, 114.
77. S. S. Kohli, 279; See McLeod, 159.
78. "Guru Nanak's concept of Nature", paper by Kapur Singh, read at Guru Nanak Quincentenary International Seminar, Patiala, 1969. *Qudret* means power. The word is used in this sense, as also in analogous senses, in Persian and Turkish.
79. *Ibid.*
80. *Influence of Islam*, 176.
81. McLeod, 207.
82. S. A. A. Rizvi, paper read at Guru Nanak Quincentenary International Seminar, Patiala, 1969.

83. See S. S. Kohli, 280-281.
84. Rizvi.
85. *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, 9.
86. Sher Singh, *Philosophy of Sikhism*.
87. *The Gospel of the Guru Granth Sahib*, clxxiv.
88. *Selections from the Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, 9.
89. *Evolution of the Khalsa*, II, 143, 145.
90. *Ibid.*, 122-125.
91. Macauliffe, IV, 76-77.
92. *Ibid.*, V, 264.
93. *Ibid.*, 167.
94. *The Panjab Past and Present*, 419.
95. Khushwant Singh, 101.
96. McLeod, 161.
97. Tara Chand, 168.
98. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, I, 31.
99. Macauliffe, I, 307.
100. Khushwant Singh, *Hymns of Guru Nanak*, 98.
101. Macauliffe, I, 37.
102. Teja Singh, *The Japji*, 2.
103. Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, 589; article by Pincott.
104. Macauliffe, I, 332.
105. *Ibid.*, 278.
106. Malcolm, 23-24.
107. *The Panjab Past and Present*, 101.
108. *Ibid.*, 102.
109. Bhai Gurdas, *Var XI*.
110. Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, 23.
111. Harnam Singh Shan.
112. McLeod, 6.

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