HINDU-SIKH RELATIONSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

Sikhs have always been honoured members of Hindu society. Hindus at large have always cherished the legacy left by the Gurus and venerated Sikh Gurudwaras no less than the shrines of any other Hindu sect. There has never been any bar on inter-marriage, inter-dining and many other modes of inter-mingling between the parent Hindu society on the one hand and the Sikh community on the other. Hindus and Sikhs share a common cultural heritage and a common historical consciousness of persecutions suffered and freedom struggles fought.

Sikh Spirituality

The Sikh sect was founded by Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1538 A.D.) and promoted further by nine other Gurus, the last of whom, Govind Singh (b. 1675), died in 1708 A.D. Guru Nanak came from a Vaishnava family in that part of the Punjab which went to Pakistan after the partition in 1947. He was born at a time when the sword of Islamic invaders had already swept over the length and breadth of India and done immeasurable damage not only to the shrines and symbols of Hinduism but also to the self-confidence of Hindus. The Punjab alongwith North-West Frontier and Sindh had suffered more heavily than elsewhere. Many Hindus in these provinces had been converted to Islam by force. The rest had been reduced to second class citizens who could not practise their religion publicly without inviting persecution at the hands of Muslim theologians and tyrants.

It was in this atmosphere that Guru Nank asserted the superiority of his ancestral spirituality as against Islamic monotheism which had divided mankind into hostile camps

and set children of the same Divinity at each other's throats. This was an act of great courage because Islam prescribed the penalty of death for anyone who said that Hinduism was a religion as good as Islam, not to speak of saying that Hinduism was superior. Many Hindus had been put to death for uttering such a "blasphemy."

What Guru Nanak had proclaimed was, however, a part of the Hindu response to the Islamic onslaught. The response was two-pronged. While Hindu warriors fought against Islamic invaders on many a battlefield all over the country, Hindu saints and sages created a country-wide spiritual upsurge which came to be known as the Bhakti Movement. The massage of this Movement was the same everywhere, based as it was on the **Vedas**, the **Itihasa-Purana** and the **Dharma-Shastras**. The only variation on the central theme was that while most schools of Bhakti deepened the spirit behind outer forms of worship, some others laid greater emphasis on **advaitic** mysticism as expounded in the **Upanishads** and the various traditions of **Yoga**. The latter schools alone could flourish in the Punjab and the rest of the North-West which had been denuded of Hindu temples and where ritual practices were forbidden by the Muslim rulers. It was natural for Guru Nanak to be drawn towards this school in the course of his spiritual seeking and sing its typical strains in his own local language.

The Bhakti Movement produced many saints in different parts of the country, North and South, East and West. They spoke and sang in several languages and idioms suited to several regions. It was inevitable that their message should go forth from as many seats and centres. Guru Nanak established one such seat in the Punjab. Those who responded to his call became known as Sikhs (Sk. **Shisyas**, disciples). The fourth Guru, Ram Das (1574-1581 A.D.), excavated a tank which subsequently became known as Amritsar (pool of nectar) and gave its name to the city that grew around it. In due course, a splendid edifice, Harimandir

(temple of Hari), rose in the middle of this tank and became the supreme centre of the Sikh sect. Its **sanctum sanctorum** came to house the **Adi Granth** containing compositions of Sikh Gurus and a score of other Hindu saints from different parts of the country. The songs of a few Muslim sufis who had been influenced by **advaita** were also included in it. The compilation of the **Adi Granth** was started by the fifth Guru, Arjun Dev (1581-1606 A.D), and completed by the tenth Guru, Govind Singh.

There is not a single line in the **Adi Granth** which sounds discordant with the spirituality of Hinduism. All strands of Hinduism may not be reflected in Sikhism. But there is nothing in Sikhism — its diction, its imagery, its idiom, its cosmogony, its mythology, its stories of saints and sages and heroes, its metaphysics, its ethics, its methods of meditation, its rituals — which is not derived from the scriptures of Hinduism. The **ragas** to which the hymns and songs of the **Adi Granth** were set by the Gurus are based on classical Hindu music. The **parikrama** (perambulation) performed by Sikhs round every Gurudwara, the **dhoop** (incense), **deep** (lamp), **naivaidya** (offerings) presented by the devotees inside every Sikh shrine, and the **prasadam** (sanctified food) distributed by Sikh priests resemble similar rites in every other Hindu place of worship. A dip in the tank attached to the Harimandir is regarded as holy by Hindus in general and Sikhs in particular as a dip in the Ganga or the Godavari.

It is this sharing of a common spirituality which has led many Hindus to worship at Sikh Gurudwaras as if they were their own temples. Hindus in the Punjab regard the **Adi Granth** as the sixth **Veda**, in direct succession to the **Rik**, the **Sama**, the **Yajus**, the **Atharva** and the **Mahabharata**. A Hindu does not have to be a Sikh in order to do homage to the **Adi Granth** and participate in Sikh religious rites. Similarly, till recently Sikhs visited temples of various other Hindu sects, went to Hindu places of pilgrimage and cherished the cow together with many other symbols of Hinduism. Religion has

never been a cause of conflict between Sikh and non-Sikh Hindus.

Sikh History

Guru Nanak's message came like a breath of fresh breeze to Hindus in the Punjab who had been lying prostrate under Muslim oppression for well-nigh five centuries. They flocked to the feet of the Sikh Gurus and many of them became initiated in the Sikh sect. The sect continued to grow till it spread to several parts of the Punjab, Sindh and the North-West Frontier. Gurudwaras sprang up in many places. The non-Sikh Hindus whose temples had been destroyed by the Muslims installed the images of their own gods and goddesses in many Sikh Gurudwaras. The Hindu temples which had survived welcomed the Adi Granth in their precincts. In due course, these places became community centres for Hindu society as a whole.

This resurgence of India's indigenous spirituality could not but disturb Muslim theologians who saw in it a menace to the further spread of Islam. The menace looked all the more serious because Sikhism was drawing back to the Hindu fold some converts on who Islam had sat lightly. The theologians raised a hue and cry which caught the ears of the fourth Mughal emperor Jahangir (1605-1627 A.D.), who had ascended the throne with the assistance of a fanatic Islamic faction. He marty red the fifth Sikh Guru, Arjun Dev, for "spreading falsehood and tempting Muslims to apostasy." Hindus everywhere mourned over the foul deed, while Muslim theologians thanked Allah for his "mercy." Guru Arjun Dev was the first martyr in Sikh history. Muslim rulers continued to shed Sikh blood till Muslim power was destroyed by resurgent Hindu heroism in the second half of the 18th Century.

The sixth Sikh Guru, Har Govind (1606-1644 A.D.), took up arms and trained a small army to resist Muslim bigotry. He was successful and Sikhs escaped persecution till the time of

the sixth Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707 A.D.), who was a veritable fiend in a human from so far as Hindus were concerned. He summoned the ninth Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur (1664-1675 A.D.), to the imperial seat at Delhi and martyred him in cold blood on his refusal to embrace Islam. Some followers of the Guru who had accompanied him were subjected to inhuman torture and torn to pieces. This was as it were a final signal that there was something very hard at the heart of Islam—a heart which the Gurus had tried to soften with their teachings of humanism and universalism. Sikhism had to accept the challenge and pick up the sword in defence of its very existence.

This transformation of Sikhism had been started already, though in a small way, by Guru Har Govind. The tenth Guru, Govind Singh, completed the process when he founded the Khalsa (Party of the Pure) in 1699 A.D. He was a versatile scholar who knew several languages, kept the company of learned Brahmins and composed excellent poetry on varied themes. He had been fascinated by the Puranic story of Goddess Durga particularly in her incarnation as **Mahisamardini.** He performed an elaborate **Yajna** presided over by pundits of the ancient lore and invoked the Devi for the protection of **dharma**. The Devi came to him in the shape of the sword which he now asked some of his followers to pick up and ply against bigotry and oppression. Those who could muster the courage and dedication to die in defence of **dharma** were invited by him to become members of the Khalsa by wearing the five emblems of this heroic order—**Kesh** (unshorn hair) **Kangha** (comb), **Kada** (steel bracelet), **Kachha** (shorts) and **Kirpan** (sword). A new style of initiation termed **pahul** was ordained for this new class of Sikh warriors—sipping a palmful of water sweetened with sugar and stirred by a double-edged sword. Every member of the Khalsa had to add the honorific Singh (lion) to his name so that he may be distinguished from the non-Khalsa Sikhs who could continue with their normal attire

and nomenclature. No distinction of caste or social status was to be recognised in the ranks of the Khalsa.

The Khalsa was not a new religious sect. It was only a martial formation within the larger Sikh fraternity, as the Sikhs themselves were only a sect within the larger Hindu society. It was started with the specific mission of fighting against Muslim tyranny and restoring freedom for the Hindus in their ancestral homeland. Soon it became a hallowed tradition in many Hindu families, Sikh as well as non-Sikh, to dedicate their eldest sons to the Khalsa which rightly came to be regarded as the sword-arm of Hindu society.

Guru Govind Singh was forced to fight against a whole Muslim army before he could consolidate the Khalsa. His two teen-aged sons courted martyrdom along with many other members of the Khalsa in a running battle with a fully equipped force in hot pursuit. His two other sons who were mere boys were captured and walled up alive by the orders of a Muslim governor after they refused to embrace Islam. The Guru himself had to go into hiding and wander from place to place till he reached Nanded town in far-off Maharashtra. He was murdered by a Muslim fanatic to whom he had granted an interview inside his own tent. But the mighty seed he had planted in the shape of the Khalsa was soon to sprout, grow speedily and attain to the full stature of a strong and well-spread-out tree.

Before he died, Guru Govind Singh had commissioned Banda Bairagi, a Rajput from Jammu to go to the Punjab and punish the wrong-doers. Banda more than fulfilled his mission. He was joined by fresh formations of the Khalsa and the Hindus at large gave him succour and support. He roamed all over the Punjab, defeating one Muslim army after another in frontal fights as well as in guerilla warfare. Sirhind, where Guru Govind Singh's younger sons had been walled up, was stormed and sacked. The bullies of Islam who had walked with immense swagger till only the other day had to run for cover. Large parts of the Punjab were

liberated from Muslim despotism after a spell of nearly seven centuries.

The Mughal empire, however, was still a mighty edifice which could mobilize a military force far beyond Banda's capacity to match. Gradually, he had to yield ground and accept defeat as his own following thinned down in battle after battle. He was captured, carried to Delhi in an iron cage and tortured to death in 1716 A.D. Many other members of the Khalsa met the same fate in Delhi and elsewhere. The Muslim governor of the Punjab had placed a prize on every Khalsa head. The ranks of the Khalsa had perforce to suffer a steep decline and go into hiding.

The next upsurge of the Khalsa came in the second half of the 18th Century. The Marathas had meanwhile broken the back of Mughal power all over India and the Mughal administration in the Punjab had distintegrated speedily. A new Muslim invader, Ahmad Shah Abdali, who tried to salvage the Muslim rule, had to give up after several attempts from 1748 to 1767 A.D. His only satisfaction was that he demolished the Harimandir and desecrated the sacred tank with the blood of slaughtered cows, two times in a row. But the Sikh and non-Sikh Hindus rallied round the Khalsa again and again and rebuilt the temple every time.

The Khalsa had a field day when Abdali departed finally from the scene. By the end of the century, Muslim power evaporated all over the Punjab and several Sikh principalities came up in different parts of the province. The strongest of them was that of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1783-1839 A.D.) who wiped out the Muslim rule from Kashmir and the North West Frontier as well. He would have conquered Sindh and Afghanistan also but for the steam-roller of British imperialism which took over his far-flung kingdom as well, soon after his death.

Sikh Separatism

The British had conquered India through their superiority in the art of warfare. They could not hope to hold such a big

country by means of military might alone. They had to devise policies of divide any rule. The residues of Islamic imperialism had become their allies quite early in course of the conquest. Now they had to contend with the national society constituted by Hindus. It became the main plank of their policy, therefore, to fragment Hindu society and pit the pieces against each other. At the same time, they tried to create pockets of solid support for their regime in India. One such pocket was provided by the Sikhs.

The British planned and put into operation a move to separate and seal off the Sikh community from its parent Hindu society by converting it into a distinct religious minority like the Muslims and the Christians. Tutored Sikh theologians and scholars were patronized to make them pronounce that Sikhism was a decisive departure from Hinduism, the same as Christianity was from Judaism. The labours of Christian missionaries and the finding of Western Indology were mobilized in order to achieve this end.

Christian missionaries had discovered quite early in their evangelical endeavours that the strength of Hindu society and culture lay ultimately in the mainstream of Hindu spirituality as expounded in the **Vedas**, the **Puranas** and the **Dharmashastras**. It was this spirituality which had served Hindu society in meeting and defeating several foreign invaders. The missionaries had, therefore, subjected this spirituility to a sustained attack by misnaming it as Brahmanism and misrepresenting it as a system of polytheistic and idolatorous paganism leading to sin in this world and perdition in the next.

At a later stage, Western Indologists had joined forces with the Christian missionaries, sometimes inadvertently due to their ignorance of Indian culture and sometimes deliberately due to mischievous political motives. According to the "scientific studies" carried out by the Indologists, Brahminism was an alien imposition on India brought in by "Aryan invaders" who had driven the "native Dravidians" to

the South around 1500 B.C. Their "higher criticism" had "revealed" that the core of Brahmanism consisted of "primitive animism, puerile priestcraft and caste oppression of the enslaved aborigines." They presented Buddhism and Jainism as "revolts" against the social system created by Brahmanism. The "revolt" was stated to have been continued and carried forward by some schools of the medieval Bhakti Movement of which Sikhism was supposed to be the foremost.

It was now relatively easy for some Sikh theologians and scholars to prove that Sikhism was closer to Christianity and Islam than to Hinduism. They forced Sikhism into the moulds of Semitic theologies. Sikhism, they pronounced, was monotheistic while Hinduism was polytheistic. Sikhism had a Book in the **Adi Granth** like the **Bible** and the **Quran**, while Hinduism had no Book. Sikhism, like Christianity and Islam had an apostolic tradition in its ten Gurus, while Hinduism knew no prophets. Sikhism frowned upon idolatory while Hinduism was full of it. Sikhism had no use for the **Vedas**, the **Puranas** and the social system of the **Dharmashastras** which formed the cornerstones of Hinduism. And so on, this exercise in alienating Sikhism from its parent Hinduism has been painstaking as well as persistent.

Small wonder that this perverted version of Sikhism should start showing signs of fanaticism and bigotry which have all along characterised monotheistic creeds like Islam and Christianity. Monotheism is the mother of all closed societies and closed cultures. It always divides mankind into believers and non-believers, momims and kafirs, and sets the one against the other. Sikh Gurus had struggled indefatiguably to rid this country of this ideological barbarism brought in by Islamic invaders. They had stood squarely for humanism, universalism and pluralism which have always been the hallmarks of Hindu spirituality. By forcing Sikhism into monotheistic moulds Sikh scholars have betrayed the Gurus. Sooner this scholarship is disowned by the Sikh

society at large, the better it will be for its spiritual and cultural welfare.

There is no dearth of Sikh scholars who continue to see Sikh spirituality in the larger and older spiritual tradition of the **Upanishads** and the **Puranas**. But the dominant Sikh politicians who control the SPGC purse have progressively extended their patronage to the misinterpreters of Sikh scriptures. Let us hope that it is a passing phase and that truth will triumph in the long run. The Sikh scholars who cherish the spirituality bequeathed by the Gurus should come forward and make themselves heard more and more. Their voice is bound to ring true in the heart of the Sikh masses—a heart which is still tuned to **Sabad-Kirtan**, singing the ancient strains of **Sanatana Dharma**.

Sita Ram Goel

Hindu-Sikh Relationship

To fulfil a certain need of the hour, Guru Govind Singh preached the gospel of the Khalsa, the pure or the elect. Those who joined his group passed through a ceremony known as **pahul**, and to emphasize the martial nature of their new vocation, they were given the title of Singh or "lion". Thus began a sect not based on birth but which drew its recruits from those who were not Khalsa by birth. It was wholly manned by the Hindus.

Military organisation has taken different forms in different countries at different times. The Khalsa was one such form thrown up by a tyrannized people, weak in arms but strong in determination. This form worked and the people of the Punjab threw away the Mughal tyranny. But fortunes change; in 1849, the British took over the Punjab. The old-style Khalsa was no longer possible and the recruitment to it almost ceased. The Punjab Administration Report of 1851-52 observes : "The sacred tank at Umritsur is less thronged than formerly, and the attendance at the annual festival is diminishing yearly. The initiatory ceremony for adult is now rarely performed." Not only did the fresh recruitment stop, but also a new exodus began. The same Report says that people leave the Khalsa and "join the ranks of Hinduism whence they originally came, and bring up their children as Hindus."

The phenomenon continued unabated. The Administration Report of 1854-55 and 1855-56 finds that "now that the Sikh commonwealth is broken up, people cease to be initiated into Sikhism and revert to Hinduism." At about this time, a census was taken. It revealed that the

Lahore division which included Manjha, the original home of the Sikhs, had only 200,000 Sikhs in a population of three million. This exodus may account at least partly for this small number.

The development raised no question. To those who were involved, this was perfectly in order and natural. Nobody was conscious of violation of any code. Hindus were Sikhs and Sikhs were Hindus. The distinction between them was functional, not fundamental. A Sikh was a Hindu in a particular role. When under the changed circumstances, he could not play that role, he reverted to his original status. The Government of the day admitted that "modern Sikhism was little more than a political association, formed exclusively from among Hindus, which men would join or quit according to the circumstances of the day."

This development, perfectly in accord with Indian reality, was not liked by the British. They considered it as something "to be deeply deplored, as destroying a bulwark of our rule."

"Sikhism in Danger"

Imperialism thrives on divisions and it sows them even where they do not exist. The British Government invited one Dr. E. Trumpp, a German Indologist and missionary, to look at Sikh scriptures and prove that their theology and cosmology were different from those of the Vedas and the Upanishads. But he found nothing in them to support this view. He found Nanak a "thorough Hindu," his religion "a Pantheism, derived directly from Hindu sources." In fact, the influence of Islam on subsequent Sikhism was, according to him, negative. "It is not improbable that the Islam had a great share in working silently these changes, which are directly opposed to the teachings of the Gurus," he says. However, to please his clients, he said that the external marks of the Sikhs separated them from the Hindus and once these were lost, they relapsed into Hinduism. Hence, Hinduism was a danger to Sikhism and the external marks must be preserved

by the Sikhs at all costs. Precisely because there was a fundamental unity, the accidental difference had to be pushed to the utmost and made much of.

From then onwards, "Sikhism in danger" became the cry of many British scholar-administrators. Lepel Henry Griffen postulated that Hinduism had always been hostile to Sikhism and even socially the two had been antagonistic. One Max Arthur Macauliffe, a highly placed British administrator, became the loudest spokesman of this thesis. He told the Sikhs that Hinduism was like a "boa constrictor of the Indian forests," which "winds its opponent and finally causes it to disappear in its capacious interior." The Sikhs "may go that way," he warned. He was pained to see that the Sikhs regarded themselves as Hindus which was, "in direct opposition to the teachings of the Gurus." He put words into the mouth of the Gurus and invented prophecies by them which anticipated the advent of the white race to whom the Sikhs would be loyal. He described "the pernicious effects of the up-bringing of Sikh youths in a Hindu atmosphere." These youths, he said, "are ignorant of the Sikh religion and of its prophecies in favour of the English and contract exclusive customs and prejudices to the extent of calling us **Malechhas** or persons of impure desires, and inspire disgust for the customs and habits of Christians."

It was a concerted effort in which the officials, the scholars and the missionaries all joined. In order to separate the Sikhs, they were even made into a sect of Islam. For example, one Thomas Patrick Hughes, who had worked as a missionary for twenty years in Peshawar, edited the Dictionary of Islam. The work itself is scholarly but, like most European scholarship, it had a colonial inspiration. The third biggest article in this work, after Muhammad and the Quran, is on Sikhism. It devotes one fourth of a page to the Sunnis and, somewhat more justly, seven fourth of a page to the Shias, but devotes eleven and a half pages to the Sikhs! Probably, the editor himself thought it rather excessive; for he offers an explanation to the Orientalists who "may,

perhaps, be surprised to find that Sikhism has been treated as a sect of Islam." Indeed, it is surprising to the non-Orientalists too. For it must be a strange sect of Islam where the word 'Muhammad' does not occur even once in the writings of its founder, Nanak. But the inclusion of such an article "in the present work seemed to be most desirable," as the editor says. It was a policy matter.

Army Policy

The influence of scholarship is silent, subtle and long-range. Macauliffe and others provided categories which became the thought-equipment of subsequent Sikh intellectuals. But the British Government did not neglect the quicker administrative and political measure. They developed a special Army Policy which gave results even in the short run. While they disarmed the nation as a whole, they created privileged enclaves of what they called martial races. The British had conquered the Punjab with the help of **Poorabiya** soldiers, many of them Brahmins, but they played a rebellious role in 1857. So the British dropped them and sought other elements. The Sikhs were chosen. In 1855, there were only 1500 Sikh soldiers, mostly **Mazhabis**. In 1910, there were 33 thousands out of a total of 174 thousands, this time mostly Jats—just a little less than one-fifth of the total army strength. Their very recruitment was calculated to give them a sense of separateness and exclusiveness. Only such Sikhs were recruited who observed the marks of the Khalsa. They were sent to receive baptism according to the rites prescribed by Guru Govind Singh. Each regiment had its own **granthis**. The greetings exchanged between the British officers and the Sikh soldiers were **Wahguruji ka Khalsa! Wahguruji ki Fateh**. A secret C.I.D. Memorandum, prepared by D. Patrie, Assistant Director, Criminal Intellegence, Government of India (1911), says that "every endeavour has been made to preserve them (Sikh soldiers) from the contagion of idolatory," a name the colonial-missionaries gave to

Hinduism. Thanks to these measures, the "Sikhs in the Indian Army have been studiously nationalized," Macauliffe observed. About the meaning of this "nationalization", we are left in no doubt. Petrie explains that it means that the Sikhs were "encouraged to regard themselves as a totally distinct and separate nation." No wonder, the British congratulated themselves and held that the "preservation of Sikhism as a separate religion was largely due to the action of the British officers," as a British administrator put it.

De-Hinduization

The British also worked on a more political level. Singh Sabhas were started, manned mostly by ex-soldiers. These worked under Khalsa Diwans established at Lahore and Amritsar. Later on, in 1902, the two Diwans were amalgamated into one body—the Chief Khalsa Diwan, providing political leadership to the Sikhs. They all wore the badge of loyalty to the British. As early as 1872, the loyal Sikhs supported the cruel suppression of the Namdhari Sikhs who had started a Swadeshi movement. They were described as a "wicked and misguided sect". The same forces described the Ghadarites in 1914 as "rebels" who should be dealt with mercilessly.

These organisations also spearheaded the movement for the de-Hinduization of the Sikhs and preached that the Sikhs were distinct from the Hindus. Anticipating the Muslims, they represented to the British Government as far back as 1888 that they be recognized as a separate community. They expelled the Brahmins from the Har Mandir, where the latter had worked as priests. They also threw out the idols of "Hindu" Gods from this temple which were installed there.*

* A student, Bir Singh, in a letter to Khalsa Akhbar, (Feb. 12, 1897) tells us of a picture of Durga painted on the front wall of a room near the Dukhbhanjani Beri in the Golden Temple precincts. "The Goddess stands on golden sandals and she has many hands—ten or perhaps twenty. One of the hands is stretched out and in this she holds a **khanda**. Guru Govind Singh stands barefoot in front of it with his hands folded," he says.

We do not know what these Gods were and how "Hindu" they were, but most of them are adoringly mentioned in the poems of Guru Nanak. At any rate, more often than not, iconoclasm has hardly much spiritual content; on the other hand, it is a misanthropic idea and is meant to show one's hatred for one's neighbour. In this particular case, it was also meant to impress the British with one's loyalty. Hitherto, the Brahmins had presided over different Sikh ceremonies which were the same as those of the Hindus†. There was now a tendency to have separate rituals. In 1909, the Ananda Marriage Act was passed.

Thus the seed sown by the British began to bear fruit. In 1898, Kahan Singh, the Chief Minister of Nabha and a pacca loyalist, wrote a pamphlet: *Hum Hindu Nahin Hain* (We are not Hindus). This note, first struck by the British and then picked up by the collaborationists, has not lacked a place in subsequent Sikh writings and politics, leading eventually in our own time to an intransigent politics and terroristic activities. But that the Sikhs learn their history from the British is not peculiar to them. We all do it. With the British, we all believe that India is merely a land where successive invaders made good, and that this country is only a miscellany of ideas and peoples — in short, a nation without a **nomos** or personality or vision of its own.

The British played their game as best as they could, but they did not possess all the cards. The Hindu-Sikh ties were too intimate and numerous and these continued without much strain at the grass-root level. Only a small section maintained that there was a "distinct line of cleavage between Hinduism and Sikhism"; but a large section, as the British found, "favours, or at any rate views with indifference the re-absorption of the Sikhs into Hinduism." They found it

† A letter in Khalsa Akhbar (Oct. 8, 1897) tells us how "the pujaris of the Taran Taran Gurudwara held the Shraddha ceremony of Guru Arjun on Tuesday, Bhadon, 31."

sad to think that very important classes of Sikhs like Nanak Panthis or Sahajdahris did not even think it "incumbent on them to adopt the ceremonial and social observances of Govind Singh," and did not "even in theory, reject the authority of the Brahmins."

The glorification of the Sikhs was welcome to the British to the extent it separated them from the Hindus, but it had its disadvantages too. Mr. Petrie found it a "constant source of danger," something which tended to give the Sikhs a "wind in the head." Sikh nationalism once stimulated refused British guidance and developed its own ambitions. The neo-nationalist Sikhs thought of a glorious past and had dreams of a glorious future, but neither in his past nor in his future "was there a place for the British Officer," as a British administrator complained. Any worthwhile Sikh nationalism was incompatible with loyalty to the British. When neo-nationalists like Labh Singh spoke of the past "sufferings of the Sikhs at the hands of the Muhammadans," the British found in the statement a covert reference to themselves. When they admired the Gurus for "their devotion to religion and their disregard for life," the British heard in it a call to sedition.

Sikh nationalism was meant to hurt the Hindus, but in fact it hurt the British. For what nourished Sikh nationalism also nourished Hindu nationalism. The glories of Sikh Gurus are part of the glories of the Hindus, and these have been sung by poets like Tagore and others. On the other hand, as Christians and as rulers, the British could not go very far in this direction. In fact, in their more private consultations, they spoke contemptuously of the Gurus. Mr. Petrie considered Guru Arjun Dev as "essentially a mercenary," who was "prepared to fight for or against the Mughul as convenience or profit dictated;" he tells us how "Tegh Bahadur, as an infidel, a robber and a rebel, was executed at Delhi by the Moghul authorities." As imperialists, they naturally sympathized with the Moghuls and shared their view-point.

Voices of Revolt

While the British were devotedly busy consolidating the Empire, other forces detrimental to their labour were also at work. Indians were an ancient people and they could not be kept in subjugation for long. The Time-Spirit was also against the British. Even during the heydays of Sikh loyalty to the British, there were many rebellious voices. One Baba Nihal Singh wrote (1885) a book entitled **Khurshid-i-Khalsa**, which "dealt in an objectionable manner with the British occupation of the Punjab." When Gokhale visited the Punjab in 1907, he was received with great enthusiasm by the students of the Khalsa College, an institution started in 1892 specifically to instill loyalty in the Sikh youth. The horses of his carriage were taken out and it was pulled by the students. He spoke from the college Dharamsala from which the Granth Sahib was specially removed to make room for him. It was here that the famous poem, **Pagri Sambhal, Jatta**, was first recited by Banke Dayal, editor of *Jhang Sayal*; it became the battle-song of the Punjab revolutionaries.

There was a general awakening which could not but affect the Sikh youth, too. Mr. Petrie observes that the "Sikhs have not been, and are not, immune from the disloyal influences which have been at work among other sections of the populace."

A most powerful voice of revolt came from America where many Punjabis, mostly Sikh Jat ex-soldiers, had settled. Many of them had been in Hong Kong and other places as soldiers in the British regiments. There they heard of a far-away country where people were free and prosperous. Their imagination was fired. The desire to emigrate was reinforced by very bad conditions at home. The drought of 1905-1907 and the epidemic in its wake had killed two million people in the Punjab. In the first decade of this century, the region suffered a net decrease in population. Due to new fiscal and monetary policies and new economic arrangements, there was a large-scale

alienation of land from the cultivators and hundreds of thousands of the poor and middle peasants were wiped out or fell into debt. Many of them emigrated and settled in British Columbia, particularly Vancouver. Here they were treated with contempt. They realized for the first time that their sorry status abroad was due to their colonial status at home. They also began to see the link between India's poverty and British imperialism. Thus many of them, once loyal soldiers who took pride in this fact, turned rebels. They raised the banner of Indian nationalism and spoke against the Singh Sabhas, the Chief Khalsa Diwan and the Sardar Bahadurs at home. They spoke of **Bharat-Mata**; their heroes were patriots and revolutionaries from Bengal and Maharashtra, and not their co-religionists in the Punjab whom they called the "traffickers of the country."

SGPC And Akalis

The earlier trends, some of them mutually opposed, became important components of subsequent Sikh politics. The pre-war politics continued under new labels at an accelerated pace. During this period, social fraternization with the Hindus continued as before, but politically the Sikh community became more sharply defined and acquired a greater group-consciousness.

In the pre-war period, an attempt had been made to de-Hinduize Sikhism; now it was also Khalsa-ized. Hitherto, the Sikh temples were managed by non-Khalsa Sikhs, mostly the Udasis; now these were seized and taken out of their hands. Khalsa activists, named Akalis, "belonging to the Immortal," moved from place to place and occupied different Gurudwaras. These eventually came under the control of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee in 1925. From this point onwards, Sikh religion was heavily politicalised. Those who controlled the resources of the temples controlled Sikh politics. The SGPC Act of 1925 defined Sikhs in a manner which excluded the Sahajdharis and included only the Khalsa. SGPC, Akalis, Jathas became

important in the life of the Sikh community. Non-Khalsa Sikhs became second-grade members of the community. The Akalis representing the Khalsa, acquired a new self-importance. In their new temper, they even came into conflict with the British on several occasions. The Government was less sure now of their unquestioning loyalty. As a result, their share in the Army fell from 19.2 percent in 1914 o 13.58 percent in 1930; while the Muslim share rose form 11 to 22 percent during the same period.

The period of the freedom struggle was not all idealism and warm-hearted sacrifice. There were many divisive forces, black sheep, and tutored roles. But the role of the Akalis was not always negative. They provided a necessary counterweight to the Muslim League politics. On the eve of independence, the League leaders tried to woo the Akalis. But, by and large, they were spurned. For a time, some Akali leaders played with the idea of a separate Khalistan, and the British encouraged them to present their case. But they found that they were in a majority only in two Tehsils and the idea of a separate state was not viable.

Post-Independence Period

Independence came accompanied by division of the country and large displacement of population. The country faced big problems but she managed to keep above water. We were also able to retain democracy. But just when we thought we had come out of the woods, divisive forces which lay low for a time reappeared. The old drama with a new cast began to be enacted again. Muslim separative politics, helped by huge Arab funds, has become active again. Christian missions have their own ambitions. They both are looking at the politics of extremist Sikhs with great hope and interest and they find it fits well with their own plans.

When the British showed solicitude for the minorities, national India resented it and called it a British game. But

surprisingly enough, the game continues to be played even after the British left. The minorities are encouraged to feel insecure and aggrieved. The minority stick is found handy to beat the majority. Hindu-baiting is politically profitable and intellectually fashionable. Constantly under attack, a Hindu tries to save himself by self-accusation; he behaves as if he is making amends for being a Hindu.

The atmosphere provided hot-house conditions for the growth of divisive politics. Our Sikh brethren too remembered the old lesson (never really forgotten), taught to them by the British, that they were different. Macauliffe's works published in the first decade of the century were reissued in the sixties. More recent Sikh scholars wrote histories of the Sikhs which were variations of the same theme. In no case, they provided a different vision and perspective.

In the last two decades, another separating factor too has been silently at work. Thanks to the Green Revolution and various other factors, the Sikhs have become relatively more rich and prosperous. No wonder, they have begun to find that the Hindu bond is not good enough for them and they seek a new identity readily available to them in their names and outer symbols. This is an understandable human frailty.

"You have been our defenders," Hindus tell the Sikhs. But in the present psychology, the compliment wins only contempt—and I believe rightly. For self-despisement is the surest way of losing a friend or even a brother. It also gives the Sikhs an exaggerated self-assessment.

Under the pressure of this psychology, grievances were manufactured; extreme slogans were put forward with which even moderate elements had to keep pace. In the last few years, even the politics of murder was introduced. Finding no check, it knew not where to stop; it became a law unto itself; it began to dictate, to bully. Camps came up in India as well as across the border, where young men were taught killing, sabotage and guerilla warfare. The temple at

Amritsar became an arsenal, a fort, a sanctuary for criminals. This grave situation called for necessary action which caused some unavoidable damage to the building. When this happened, the same people who looked at the previous drama, either helplessly or with an indulgent eye felt outraged. There were protest meetings, resolutions, desertions from the army, aid committees for the suspects apprehended, and even calls and vows to take revenge. The extremists were forgotten. There were two standards at work; there was a complete lack of self-reflection even among the more moderate and responsible Sikh leaders.

The whole thing created wide-spread resentment all over India which burst into a most unwholesome violence when Mrs. Indira Gandhi was assassinated. The befoggers have again got busy and they explain the whole tragedy in terms of collusion between the politicians and the police. But this conspiracy theory cannot explain the range and the virulence of the tragedy. A growing resentment at the arrogant Akali politics is the main cause of this fearful happening.

However, all is not dark. The way the common Hindus and Sikhs stood for each other in the recent happenings in the Punjab and Delhi show how much in common they have. In spite of many recent provocations, lapses and misunderstandings, they have shown that they are one in blood, history, aspiration and interest. In a time so full of danger and mischief, this age-long unity proved the most solid support. But seeing what can happen, we should not take this unity for granted. We should cherish it, cultivate it, re-emphasize it. We can grow great together; in separation, we can only hurt each other.

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