

# **HINDU-SIKH RELATIONSHIP**

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VOICE OF INDIA  
2/18, Ansari Road,  
New Delhi

1<sup>st</sup> Edition: 1985

## 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 AD) and promoted further by nine other Gurus, the last of whom, Govind Singh (b. 1675), died in 1708 AD. 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 along with 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 message 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 whom 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 martyred 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 form 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), *Kanga* (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 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The Marathas had meanwhile broken the back of Mughal power all over India and the Mughal administration in the Punjab had disintegrated 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 and 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 findings 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 spirituality to a sustained attack by misnaming it as *Brahmanism* and misrepresenting it as a system of polytheistic and idolatrous 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 indefatigably 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 Sanatan Dharma.

- Sita Ram Goel

## Hindu-Sikh Relationship

Ram Swarup

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 Mlechhas 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 longrange. 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 Intelligence, Government of India (1911), says that 'every endeavour has been made to preserve them (Sikh soldiers) from the contagion of idolatry,' 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 [*A letter in Khalsa Akhbar (Oct. 8, 1897) tells us how 'the pujaris of the Taran Taran*



*Gurudwara held the Shraddh ceremony of Guru Arjun on Tuesday, Bhadon 31.']. 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 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

neonationalist 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 neonationalists 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 selfimportance.

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 to 13.58 percent in 1930; while the Muslim share rose from 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 counter-weight 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 caste began to be enacted again. Muslim separatist 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.

# **WHITHER SIKHISM**

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*[This is the 'Foreword' to the book 'Muslim League Attack on Sikhs and Hindus in the Punjab, 1947' edited by Sardar Gurbachan Singh Talib]*

The volume in hand is a reprint of an old book compiled in 1947 by Sardar Gurbachan Singh Talib, Principal of the Lyallpur Khalsa College, Jullundur, and published in 1950 by the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee* (SGPC). It records the story of 7-million Hindus and Sikhs who were uprooted from their homes in the West Punjab, the North-Western Frontier, Sind and parts of Kashmir. It tells the story of political parleys that preceded this event, their inevitable failure, and the barbarity that immediately followed - barbarity that had elements of pre-planning. The book records the atrocities of this period - the carnage, killings, abductions and forced conversions that took place particularly in 1946-47, forcing Hindus and Sikhs to leave their hearths and homes and start on the "biggest mass migration of humanity," as the author describes it.

At the end of the book, the author gives an Appendix, 100 pages of about 50 eye-witness accounts of those atrocities. It contains statements of those who saw themselves attacked, their houses burnt, their kith and kin killed, their womenfolk abducted but who themselves survived to relate their account. The section also includes press reports and other first-hand accounts. For example, one report which appeared in *The Statesman* of April 15, 1947 narrates an event that took place in village Thoha Khalsa of Rawalpindi District. It is a story of tears and shame and also of great sacrifice and heroism. The story tells us how the Hindu-Sikh population of this tiny village was attacked by 3000-strong armed Muslims, how badly outweaponed and outnumbered, the besieged had to surrender, but how their women numbering 90 in order to "evade inglorious surrender" and save their honour jumped into a well "following the example of Indian women of by-gone days." Only three of them were saved. "There was not

enough water in the well to drown them all," the report adds. The author also gives an 85-page long "list of atrocities," date by date and region by region, that took place during the months from mid-December 1946 to the end of August 1947. And these represent only "a small fraction of what really happened," and they have to be multiplied "a hundred-fold or more... to get the right proportions," the author says.

From this it would appear that the book deals only in atrocity stories albeit true ones. But if there was nothing more to it, the events it chronicles could not hold long-range interest and it was perhaps better that the wrongs were forgotten and forgiven. We must also bear in mind that these atrocities alone could not make the full story. Even during the midst of all this carnage, there must have been many cases of humanity and chivalry and there must also have been people who rendered neighbourly help not without some risk to themselves. Let us not forget this chapter and let us be thankful to this innate goodness in man which binds humanity together and rises above the crusading ideologies that teach inhumanity.

But it would not do to neglect the other chapter dealing in unpalatable facts, particularly if those facts have a deeper story to tell and a continuing pattern to reveal, and if they disclose a larger ideational framework or ideology at work. Luckily for us the author does more than chronicle gruesome events. He goes behind them and explains why they happened. He tells us that the mass exodus did not happen as if by chance but that it was "the last culminating episode in a conspiracy that had been under planning for more than a decade before it actually occurred," that it took place because it was "the conspiracy of the Muslim League in India to establish a Muslim State which should not be encumbered with any such non-Muslim population as would be a likely factor in diluting to any extent its purely Muslim character." Therefore, the Hindus and Sikhs, the minorities in

the new Muslim homeland, were not to be suffered to stay there. This “minorityism”, the name for Hindus and Sikhs, was “the major enemy of the *Millat*,” as Rehmat Ali, one of the early League leaders and intellectuals and coiner of the word Pakistan, said.

According to its original conception, Pakistan itself was to be larger than it turned out to be; it was to include Kashmir, Assam and Bengal in the East and Hyderabad and Malabar in the South and many independent Muslim states within the rest of the Indian territory. India, or whatever remained of India, was itself to be considered *Dinia*, an important Islamic concept. The author explains that it means it “would be the continent which, if not at the moment the home of an Islamic State, was such an immediate conception, waiting to be converted and subordinated to Islam through the proselytising and conquering zeal of its sons.”

This was broadly the approach of the generality of Muslims though there were also differences of emphases and in exceptional cases even disagreement with the main thesis. Some of them, particularly of *Ulema* class, sounded a warning that Pakistan might impede the establishment of *Dinia* by arousing unnecessary resistance among the Hindus; therefore, they stayed away from the Pakistan campaign and some of them even opposed it. They came to be known as “nationalist Muslims.”

Sardar Gurbachan Singh Talib mentions this broader dimension and connects the events of the forties with the League politics and the League politics itself, through *Dinia*, with the larger Muslim politics. He, however, does not develop the point and it remains no more than a hint. But he does more than most other authors whose vision remains confined in the best of cases to the League’s activities and who provide a narrow and even distorting framework. The fact is that League politics did not initiate Muslim politics but was itself a part of this larger Muslim politics; it was neither the

latter's beginning nor its end but its continuation. Muslim politicians and scholars also see it this way. Bhutto tells us that the "starting point of Pakistan goes back over a thousand years to when Muhammad bin Qasim set foot on the soil of Sind and introduced Islam in the sub-continent." 'History of Pakistan: Past and Present', a typical textbook taught in Pakistan's schools, begins the story of Pakistan with the "Advent of Islam", giving exactly nine pages to "Pre-Islamic Civilization", negatively presented as *Jahiliya*, an important Islamic concept and a name for all pre-Islamic period. Muslim scholars have also their own idea and version of Muslims' freedom struggle and they equate it with the Muslim Empire. It began when Muslims lost their empire after Aurangzeb and partially ends with the establishment of Pakistan. Pakistan's official "History of the Freedom Movement of Muslims in the Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent covering the period from the death of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707 to the Establishment of Pakistan in 1947" reveals their approach.

## II

Muslim politics in turn is grounded in Muslim theology. Islam believes in *one* God (*their* God) but two humanities: the believers and the infidels. Islam teaches, at least according to its most pious and learned men, *Jihad* or holy war against the infidels. It is not that the infidels have done any harm to Islam or Muslims but it is simply because holy war against the infidels "is established as a divine ordinance by the word of God, who has said in the Koran, 'Slay the Infidel'," according to *Hidayah*, an old and important work widely esteemed in the Muslim world.

Similarly, it is not a question of self-defence against any aggression or any unprovoked war but it is simply because the infidels by being infidels incur "the destruction of the sword," although "they be not the first aggressors," to put it again in the language of the *Hidayah*, which derives it "from various passages in the sacred writings which are generally

received to this effect.” It reveals not only what the Islamic sacred writings say but, what is still more important, what the Muslim pious men and scholars believe these writings do. There has been a wide consensus among them about the message of these writings.

To this theology of holy war belong two related concepts: *Dar al-Harb* and *Dar al-Islam*. According to this theology, *Dar al-Harb* is a country of the infidels, a country not ruled by Muslims; Muslims have to wage a war against it and convert it into *Dar al-islam*, a country governed by Muslims. Again, it is not a question of majorities and minorities but of believers and unbelievers. A country of a majority of infidels but ruled by a small minority of Muslims, as India once was, is *Dar al-islam* and is perfectly legitimate and conforms more truly to the divine injunction and is superior in Allah’s eyes to a country ruled by its own people but who are infidels. Similarly, it is not a question of “equal rights” for all citizens irrespective of their religions. Such concepts are un-Islamic. Under Islam, non-Muslims, if they are allowed to exist at all, are non-citizens or *zimmis*; only Muslims are full citizens.

It also means that, theoretically, the believers are at war with the infidels all the time, though, in practice, a war may not be possible at a particular time. The actual shape of the war will depend on many external factors, not the least of them being the stage of preparedness of the believers for the venture. But they must continue exerting and planning and looking for opportunities. This is the essence of *Jihad*. It has been widely discussed in Islamic books on religious laws.

But it does raise some problems on the practical level. For example, when Europe ruled and the whole Muslim world was on its knees and Muslims were not in a position to wage an effective war, what would they do? Then the concept of *Jihad* had to be diluted and in India another concept was added, the concept of *Dar al-Aman*. According to this concept, it was sufficient if Muslims had the liberty to give their *azan-*

call (which was banned by Maharaja Ranjit Singh), to offer their *namaz* and keep their fast, and it was enough for them to be most loyal to a Christian power. There are also other complicating problems in a world where nationalism has become a new recognised value and a citizen is governed by his country's laws and owes his first allegiance to his country. But Islam is essentially pan-Islamic and pan-Islamism must override the demands both of territorial nationalism and of universal humanism. In this sense extra-territorialism (and also religious exclusivism) is fundamental to Islam. If the contending parties are Muslim, nationalism could still have a meaning; but when of the two contending parties, one is Muslim and the other infidel there is no dilemma for the Muslims of both countries and their duty is clear. The Muslims living in *Dar al-Harb* must support a *Jihad* against their Government.

This is the ideational framework from which the events of 1940s derived. For those who know this framework, the chapter of Muslim history which this book discusses is not new; to them, it is an old chapter and also the one which has not yet closed, not even its carnage and exodus. Hindus have been subjected to these forces for centuries, and these forces continue to operate unabated even now. Take for example, the exodus from West Pakistan, the subject of the present book. Hindus have known many such exodus in the past. Repeated Muslim invasions created repeated Hindu exodus. Speaking of the "wonderful exploits" of Mahmud Ghaznavi (A.D. 997-1030), Alberuni tells us how "*Hindus became like atoms of dust scattered in all directions.*" All along the coast of the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf, and also along old trade-routes passing through North-West and Central Asia, there were prosperous Hindu settlements. All these inhabitants became refugees. Exodus continues (besides extensive infiltration) from Bangladesh and the Kashmir Valley even today. The only thing unique about the 1947-

exodus was that thanks to its Sikh component it was not a one-way traffic.

In this larger perspective, Pakistan itself is not a new phenomenon, nor does the story end with its creation. On the other hand, old politics continues under more unfavourable conditions for India. Pakistan is emerging as an important focal point of Islamic fundamentalism and it is seeking new alignments in the Middle East in conformity to its new role. Muslim fundamentalism is a danger in the long run both to the West as well as the East, but it is not yet fully realized. Meanwhile, Pakistan is using its new position of leadership against India. While holding out the threat of nuclear blackmail, it is more than a willing ally of any country or group which has any quarrel with or grouse against India. In India itself, Pakistan enjoys a large support, not only amongst Muslims who have always had a soft corner for it and who, in fact, had an important role in its creation, but also amongst Hindu intelligentsia, the country's left and secular elite who control its media and politics. The motives are complicated into which we cannot go here. But meanwhile India is being subjected to a war of subversion and aggression, a war hot and cold, active and passive. Pakistan has become an instigator and supplier, a trainer, an arsenal and a safe rear of many guerilla and militant forces.

But Hindu India remains confused and even unconcerned. It has been a poor student of history; it has therefore also neglected its lessons; it has failed to read properly the forces, particularly ideological forces that have been and are still at work to keep it down. In fact, it does not even acknowledge them. It still stubbornly clings to its old assumption that the League politics came out of the scheming head of one Jinnah who was aided and abetted by the British, and that Muslims and Islam had nothing to do with it; that, in fact, they were reluctant victims of this politics and were pushed into it by an intransigent Hindudom.

All this we believe partly because it involves doing nothing, anticipating nothing, planning nothing, and we can continue to live from day to day. A more realistic and faithful appraisal will impose on us duties of a different kind and scope, duties which we therefore shirk. **We have learnt to live without thinking and we have got used to the idea of a shrunken and shrinking India.** We can now think of India without Afghanistan, without the North-West Frontier Province, without Punjab and Sind, without East Bengal, and we can do the same without Kashmir and other parts in the future. Why assume avoidable responsibilities?

Or perhaps the sickness is deeper. Long back, Sri Aurobindo saw the "root cause of India's weakness," not in foreign yoke or poverty or dearth of spiritual experience, but in the "decline of thinking power." Everywhere he saw "inability or unwillingness to think, which is a sign of tragic decadence."

### III

This book has another kind of interest for us. It was published by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, something which would be unthinkable now. The book belongs to the time when Hindus and Sikhs were spoken of in one breath indistinguishably and it was taken for granted that they were one and that they had suffered and striven together. Its approach is very different from the one which had continued to be canvassed for over half a century even before this book was written and which has also continued to be in vogue during the whole post-Independence era. Now for a century the Sikhs have been told by the controllers of Akali politics and by neo-Akali writers that the Sikhs are not Hindus, that instead of deriving from *Hindu* Advaita, *Hindu* incarnation, *Hindu* theory of karma and rebirth, *Hindu* Moksha, Sikhism has grown in revolt against *Hindu* polytheism, *Hindu* idolatry, *Hindu* caste-system and *Hindu* Brahmanism. And many Akali scholars have been re-



interpreting their scriptures and re-writing their history in the light of this new understanding of Sikhism. The early inspiration was provided by Christian missionaries and British officials like Macauliffe, but it was internalized by many Akali scholars. While Kahan Singh of Nabha said at the end of the last century that Sikhs were not Hindus, some neo-Akali writers now take pride in saying that they are some kind of Muslims.

As Akali politics developed its separatism, the post-Independence neo-Akali writers also learnt to look at events of the 1940s through eyes very different from those of Gurbachan Singh Talib. His approach enjoys no sympathy with them and he is neglected by them. In '*A History of the Sikhs*' by Khushwant Singh, first published in 1963, Gurbachan Singh Talib's book is mentioned but dismissed as one which gives "the Hindu-Sikh point of view," and which forms that "mass of contradictory statements" with which the "future historian shifting the documents of the partition riots will be faced." He also evaluates these facts differently. Gurbachan Singh Talib is pained and is angry that the Sikhs were treated shabbily by the Muslims; Khushwant Singh shows more understanding for the Muslim side and tells us why they had to do it since the Sikhs were taking side in a conflict which was essentially a "Hindu-Muslim conflict." He tells us: "*The Sikhs were in a peculiar position in the Hindu-Muslim conflict. They professed a neutral creed but were a part of the Hindu social system. They were much the most prosperous section of the Punjab peasantry and, having been nurtured in a martial tradition, more ebullient than their numbers (13 percent in the Punjab) would warrant. The Sikhs often tried to play the role of peace-makers but since their sympathies were manifestly Hindu, as the rioting increased in intensity, the Muslims quite rightly began to look upon them as an aggressively anti-Muslim element. In any case, the Muslims felt that if Pakistan was to bring prosperity to their people, Sikhs who owned the best wheat lands of the Punjab would have to be dispossessed.*"<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Gopal Singh, another noted Akali historian, treats the subject in no different spirit. He does not mention Gurbachan Singh Talib's book at all but gives half a page to its subject-matter in his 860-page '*A History of the Sikh People*'. But unlike Khushwant Singh, he defends the Akalis who are sometimes accused of their own excesses in the riots of those days. He holds that their action was purely retaliatory and says: "*This total contempt for non-Muslim life could not fail to inflame the people of the East Punjab and the Sikh States, and retaliation started in full fury everywhere from early August. No pains were spared to pay the Muslim Leaguers in their own coin: blood for blood, loot for loot, though, abductions, conversions and rape were rare occurrences.*" Then describing the exodus from West Punjab, he adds: "*The Sikhs of the Punjab had paid full price and more for the freedom of the country and their own ruin.*"<sup>2</sup>

He does not tell us what could be done to avoid this ruin and how it could be called the price for Indian freedom from which the official Akali leadership had kept away studiously. Moreover, was it a price paid for Indian freedom or was it a penalty imposed for trying to wage the freedom struggle on wrong assumptions - assumptions which, while they involved neglecting and even undermining the truly nationalist and humanist ideas and forces, tried to make common cause with ideas and forces trying to revive an old Imperialism? The results could not be different from what they were. The question is of more than theoretical interest as the old forces are fully active again and trying to complete the old half-fulfilled task; they are also supported by the same forces which had once a hand in the division of the country and they are today even better placed than they were in the past.

But leaving aside this digression and returning to Dr. Gopal Singh, we find that though he may be critical of League-led riots he is quite in sympathy with the larger Muslim politics. He says that the Muslim grievances were "genuine", that their "modest demands were misinterpreted

and not met on time.” He even sympathises with the *Khilafat* movement and blames those who did not look at it through the Muslim eyes. He says: “*It was perversity of fact to call inconsequential a just (though seemingly exaggerated) demand of a minority (then about 80 million strong) with a political history and religious cohesion which had once swept through the world from China to Spain, and led to the establishment of the Indian and Turkish empires for at least 500 years and had introduced new discoveries in mathematics, medicine and astronomy, besides architecture, cultural mores, and culinary and decorative arts. To dismiss their pride and humiliation, both, as of no consequence, was the height of majority egotism.*”<sup>3</sup>

Is it really no more than “height of majority egotism” to think less glowingly of Islamic Imperialism? Many competent historians have regarded it as one of the cruelest phenomena of history and to Will Durant its conquest of India was “probably the bloodiest story of history.” But Dr. Gopal Singh has a right to his own personal estimate and it is wonderful to see him take so much pride in Islam’s political expansion, its religious cohesion, its Indian and Turkish empires, and make Muslims’ pride and humiliation his own. But why should he baulk at Hindus trying to recover a bit of pride in their own culture, remember a bit of their own history, achieve a measure of social cohesion, try to recover from servile attitudes imbibed over centuries, and regain some dignity for themselves? Dr. Gopal Singh finds fault with Hindus who remember the “excesses of some Muslim rulers like Aurangzeb”; he blames the Arya Samaj for its call of *Shuddhi*; he finds fault with Tilak for reviving *Ganpati Puja* as under Shivaji (Khushwant Singh’s bastard); he blames *Anand Math* and the *Bande Mataram* of Bankim; he finds fault with Gandhi who wanted Swarajya to bring in Ramrajya though he must have known that it was impossible considering the human material he was working with; and of course he is averse to Purushottam Das Tandon and Vallabhbai Patel who did not

believe that Hindu-baiting in order to woo and appease Muslim communalism was nationalist politics. In short, Dr. Gopal Singh finds it blamable in common Hindus that they are not proud of Muslim rule over them and their status of non-citizens or *zimmis* under it, and that they do not denigrate the memory of those who fought against the foreign tyranny and instead regard them as some sort of heroes.

Though Dr. Gopal Singh feels so close to Muslim history, it does not however follow that he agrees on all points with League politics and its politicians. The most serious objection he finds in their politics is that they “demanded weightages in the minority provinces on a scale which they should ridicule in the case of Sikhs.”<sup>4</sup> Another serious objection is that Muslims did not realize their own best interest and did not know that they would have done better by remaining in India than by separating. He argues: *“They were offered 40% of seats in the Central Government, equal to the Caste Hindus as late as 1946, and with the help of other minorities in the government, and their own and Sikh strength in the army (around 60 percent), they could acquire a position of such prestige, if not also of domination, that the whole of India could have felt its certain impact. With the historical dynamism [his name for a most destructive and aggressive imperialism of the world] and the egalitarianism of Islam [which was compatible with a most perfected slavery system, and which divided humanity into believers and unbelievers], what is it that they would not have achieved especially in a secular state, mostly populated by the all-embracing Hindus, their leaders by and large deeply wedded to secularism and democracy.”*<sup>5</sup>

#### IV

Dr. Gopal Singh probably does not realize what he is saying, or perhaps he does not care. He seems to say that Hindus do not matter and that they can be made quite irrelevant by means of a coalition of minorities. He also believes that the all-embracing character of Hinduism and the

secularism of Hindu leaders could also be utilized to the same end.

Minorityism of a sort already existed even under the British in as much as they ruled through favoured communities. But a full-fledged coalition of minorities which replaced the British and ruled in their place or in their behalf was not possible, nor was it a part of the dream of the loyal minorities - the coalition was meant to replace the Hindus not the British. Things have changed and the idea of a minority-coalition is now quite attractive. Neo-Leaguers find it of great strategic value in their current move for power and Shahabuddin and Co. have been advocating it for quite some time. An ideological axis between Muslim fundamentalism, pseudo-secularism, terrorism and Marxism has already existed for quite some time; now it is taking a concrete political shape.

During the British regime, while the League pursued its Muslim politics to the hilt, it kept the Congress in tow by accusing it of being a Hindu body. The latter felt its self-image compromised and it tried to prove its nationalist credentials by disowning any Hindu connection. Some of its stalwarts went further and falsified India's history and accepted the Muslim view of India and Hinduism. All this, however, did not help the Congress nor the Independence Movement but it did denature the Congress and lower down the concept of Independence and rob it of its spiritual anchorage.

Having proved its value, the politics of taunts and accusations continues unabated. Those who benefit by it have merely to hurl the epithet 'communal', and there is a panic all around and the accused try to establish their *secular* credentials by the only way they know - by denouncing Hinduism. All this has led to competitive minorityism, selective communalism, the politics of out-musliming the Muslims and Hindu-bashing. But this politics is already getting discredited and yielding opposite results. It is

awakening the Hindus and it is making them realize that the whole lot is rotten and that they should now take things in their own hands.

The context and the argument of the moment may have made Dr. Gopal Singh concede that India is secular and that this has been made possible by “all-embracing” Hinduism, but the pure-breed fraternity of secularists are not ready to make any such concession. They hold that India’s secularism is phony and it is negated by its Hinduism. Khushwant Singh finds that already India’s “official commitment to secularism is being reduced to a meaningless clause in the constitution”; which is proved by the “emphasis on Sanskrit and Hindi, study of the Aryan classics, insertion of cow-protection as a directive clause of the constitution, the increase in the number of cow-protection societies, the growth of Hindu political groups such as the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and the militant R.S.S.” And then speaking for all minorities in general and the Sikhs in particular, he says that the “chief cause of Sikh uneasiness in free India was the resurgence of Hinduism which threatened to engulf the minorities,” and that the “Hindus, who form 80% of the population, will in due course make Hinduism the state religion of India.”<sup>6</sup>

The grievances are truly on a grand scale and they coincide with Hinduism itself. **Everything that relates to a Hindu - his language, history, religion, classics - grieves our secularists.** If they were living in England, they would be objecting to Shakespeare and Milton, to the English language itself, to the Church of England, to the Englishmen being in a majority. **Hindus can never hope to satisfy these secularists and they should not even attempt to do it. They must follow their own conscience and sense of right.** Should someone also begin to speak of “the causes of Hindu uneasiness in secular India?”

Indeed, we are face to face with a strange kind of Sikhism. The Sikh Gurus had worked and fought for the

resurgence of Hinduism but now we are told that this resurgence is precisely the cause of Sikh uneasiness. Guru Govind Singh started sending Sikh Gyanis to Varanasi to learn Sanskrit and to study the Epics, the Puranas and other classics to understand the Adi Granth itself, but the neo-Akali ideologues find Sanskrit and these classics objectionable. Maharaja Ranjit Singh banned cow-killing in his kingdom and a hundred Sikhs were blown to smithereens by the British because they stood for cow-protection, but now it is an anathema to secularist Akali scholars. The fact is that it is not the old Sikhism of the Gurus but a new version of it which has been taking shape under the impact of very different ideological and political forces that we are meeting. This neo-Akalism is a child of self-alienation and spiritual illiteracy and it is at odd not only with Hinduism but for that very reason with Sikhism itself.

Perhaps the neo-Akali ideologues do not realize what they are saying and also that they have quite a part in shaping the current cruel events in the Punjab. Here I am not referring to the more dramatic and terroristic aspect of the situation with which some of them at least - and, certainly, our two historians - are not in sympathy and which they have even opposed with courage, but I am talking of the mind and the ideas and the sympathies that such works shape, and the distorted view of Sikh scriptures and history which they teach which incline many Akali youths to unworthy roles and set them adrift from their spiritual moorings.

V.S. Naipaul, in his recent book, *'India: a Million Mutinies Now'*, provides some intimate glimpses into the minds of some of the actors in the Punjab tragedy. He tells us of an interview which he heard on the British Radio and which Bhindranwale had given from the premises of the Golden Temple undergoing fortification just before the Blue Star Operation: in this interview, Bhindranwale had said that Sikhism "was a revealed religion; and the Sikhs were people

of the Book." Naipaul says that he was "struck then by the attempt to equate Sikhism with Christianity; to separate it from its speculative Hindu aspects, even from its guiding idea of salvation as union with God and freedom from transmigration." But at that time, he thought that it was merely "an attempt, by a man intellectually far away, to make his cause more acceptable to his foreign interviewer." He did not realize that the attempt to give a Semitic rendering to their religions is an old one and is not limited to Sikhism alone, nor to men "intellectually far away." It has very much to do with the circumstances in which the world came to be dominated by people of Semitic religions. During this period, monolatry, prophetism, revelation - concepts of little spiritual validity or worth - acquired a great political clout and social prestige and these began to be adopted by many subject people. They wanted their religions to look like the Semitic ones with a single God, a Revelation, a Prophet or Saviour, and a single Church or *Ummah*.

That is, however, a large question into which we need not go here. But returning to Naipaul we find that he discovered this phenomenon all along among most militants he interviewed. One militant, also an intellectual of a sort, gave him a pamphlet which he had written. Naipaul tells us that the theme of it was "the separateness of the Sikh faith and ideology from the Hindu; its further theme was that the Punjab was geographically and culturally more a part of Middle East than of India. The great enemy of Sikhism and the Sikh empire of Ranjit Singh had been - again - brahmanism."

The writer of the pamphlet also narrated to Naipaul his evolution into a militant Akali; he said he was baptized by the *amrit* stirred "with the sword of Ali," which was as the new lore believed, "in the possession of the Moghul emperors, and it was presented to Guru Govind Singh by Moghul emperor Bahadur Shah." Naipaul reflects that again in the version of



the Sikh faith that the narrator propounded, "there was an Islamic twist, a non-Hindu, a non-Indian aspect, a separateness of the faith from the land of its Origin."

Naipaul also asked his narrator whether he "had noticed any discrimination as a Sikh." He said yes; "he remembered that once, when he was queuing up to buy a railway ticket, the booking clerk had been rough with him." And that is all. In most cases, the Sikh grievances do not amount to anything more than this. The fact is that Sikhs cannot complain of economic and political discrimination - they are by far the most prosperous community and over-represented in most walks of life. Their grievances are really of the privileged and of the haves, not of have-nots. Also, as we have already seen, the neo-Akalis have embraced a good deal of League politics and as a result they have also adopted grievances suited to that politics.

## V

But one might justly hold that what the Akali ideologues say is nothing unique, and that they merely voice the current wisdom found amongst our secularists - or pseudo-secularists if you win - who dominate our media, our universities and our political life; that even in their antipathy towards Hinduism and attraction for League politics, they follow rather than lead the fashion of the day. True, as their own politics increasingly acquired the look of League politics, they found that what justified it also justified them and therefore they adopted its arguments and rationalizations. But in its deeper ideation, they were neither its initiators nor its loudest spokesmen. That honour belongs to Macaulayites, Marxists, Royists, and liberty forums. Akali self-alienation is only a small part and one expression of this larger Hindu self-alienation.

This larger self-alienation has to do with the historical circumstances of the last thousand years. During this long

period, India has lived under two Imperialisms and it was constantly under their military, political and ideological attack. As a result, its psyche was badly wounded; it lost self-confidence and developed a deep sense of inferiority. Hindus became apologetic about their religion, their Gods, their culture, their institutions; they began to look at themselves through the eyes of their rulers, thus learning to hold their religion and culture in low esteem and even in contempt; some for sheer survival learnt to be on the side of their masters and betray their own people; some learnt to disown their identity in order to please their masters. In due course, this self-denigration and self-disowning became a part of Hindu psyche.

Like any other imperialism, Muslim and British Imperialisms also created a class of mercenaries and compradors - and here I am talking of intellectual mercenaries; they created a collaborationist *tradition* or *school* which endured even after the rulers had left. Marxist historians, for example, belong to the school of Hindu *munshis* whom the Mughal kings employed to eulogize their rule and their religion, and who wrote servilely to flatter their patrons and whose writings failed to reflect even remotely the feelings, fears, hopes and yearnings of their own subject fellow brothers.

This phenomenon of self-depreciation was not limited to India alone but it was widely spread. When the West became dominant, many ancient peoples and cultures and countries including Russia and China were filled with a great sense of inferiority. This inferiority created a class of people who were ashamed of their own past and wanted to be like the West. In due course, when they captured power in their countries they proved the worst enemies of their people and great persecutors of their cultures. In China, the communists declared war on their ancient ethics and thought, once

considered glorious human achievements; they destroyed half-a-million Buddhist shrines.

In Mongolia has been discovered a mass grave containing the remains of thousands of Buddhist monks liquidated by a former communist regime. An 83-old man, once head of an extermination squad, admitted that he personally put 15,724 to death. 1197-at-Nalanda was repeated not by invading Muslim armies but by local communist revolutionaries and social transformers.

But not all these *westernizers* lacked patriotism. What they lacked was a larger view and a deeper wisdom. They failed to see that the Western culture itself was based on a very inadequate definition of man and a distorted view of nature.

Returning to the Indian story, we find that as Hinduism became a dirty word, and Hindus learnt to disown their identity, other smaller identities and narrower loyalties, once part of a larger milieu, came to the forefront. Castes and *panths* and creeds became prominent; and once becoming important they acquired their own momentum, power, justification and vested interests.

Renascent Hinduism will have to contend with these forces; it will have to overcome the forces of self-denigration and self-alienation; it will have to become strong so that its present weakness does not breed self-contempt in its own sons and daughters but on the other hand its new strength should be such that those of them who were once forced to leave come back to their ancestral fold in pride. It must also realize that it is not just a community in competition with other communities, but that it is a nation and a civilization which has a great role to play in the world. It must work on this larger self-definition and assert this larger self-identification. No lesser definition will do.

But the task is not easy. The old imperialist forces are active and they are mobilizing old allies who worked for the

division of the country. They have been joined by new vested interests who find disintegration of the country equally useful or close to their heart. They daily tell you through the media they control that India is not one, that it is only a geographical expression, or merely an administrative entity; they tell you that while India is an abstraction, its reality is “ethnic minorities” who have a right to their “national homelands.” And as they push their right with the help of AK-47 rifles and Kalashnikovs, they find that they have powerful friends and protectors in Delhi and powerful ideologues of their cult in the press. Jagmohan, in his recent *My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir*, shows the deep sickness that has overtaken the country, the intimate nexus that exists between the militants, the so-called national political parties, and groups of doubtful motives working under various names: liberty and civil rights forums, prominent citizens or private initiative, etc. Their game is obvious; it is to confuse the nation’s counsel, to weaken its will, to create a soft society so that its parts can be picked up one by one.

Those who are against India are even more opposed to Hinduism, a name for India at its deepest and most cultural and spiritual; Hinduism embodies India’s civilization dimension and gives it cohesion, integrity, continuity and unity. They know that before they can subvert India, they must subvert Hinduism, that the country’s balkanization is not possible without prior fragmentation of the Hindu society. Hence their tenacious attack on Hinduism, their need to unleash caste politics. The game-plan allows the talents of people like V.P. Singhs, Chandrashekhars and Mulayam Singhs full scope; it allows the Naxalites, Marxists, Macaulayites to make their full contribution; it allows Pakistan, petrodollars, evangelists, liberation theologians and several other unnamed agencies to play a crucial role not always hidden.

But let not these odds discourage us. Hinduism has survived in spite of them and it will again grow strong in spite of them. Hinduism is weak in many ways, but it is still strong in spiritual knowledge. It does not derive from dogmas and personality cults, but it is grounded in ethics, in the knowledge of the Spirit, in the culture of Yogas. Therefore its spiritual message is irresistible which is proved by the fact that though it has sent out no missionaries it has attracted some of the best minds of the world. In fact, they are finding that Hinduism is perhaps the only religion for the spiritually awakened people though it has also enough in it to help people of various grades and stations to make spiritual progress. They are discovering through their own reflection that true spirituality has little to do with the God of their conventional religion - more often than not a psychic formation thrown up by a mind not always pure - but with Self-knowledge, with *Atma*; not with Commandments (often theological rather than moral) but with the inherent ethics of the soul, its categorical imperative; not with prophets and saviours (sometimes not even edifying figures), but with discovering truth-forms of the soul. The worst enemy of man is not an inadequate social environment, but an inadequate philosophy, a distorted ideology, an undeveloped and backward spirituality.

Hinduism or rather something akin to Hinduism is the natural religion of seeking men. Dogmatic religions are impositions. Many thinking men in Europe and America are realizing this and they are returning to their nations' old Gods and old religions which they lost when Christianity triumphed. And as they do it, they discover their natural affinity with Hinduism; they also find that Hinduism still preserves the knowledge that once gave life to these lost religions, the knowledge which can also revive them and their Gods again.

The same thing is bound to happen in other parts and countries like Egypt, Iran, Syria, and Central Asia once they acquire minimum freedom to discuss spiritual matters and investigate their past. Then they would realize that they are not peoples of yesterday, but are ancient nations who had their own developed spiritualities and that Islam was imposed on them by force. Hindu India could help them and such other countries to rediscover their spiritual roots.

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*New Delhi,*

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*October 18, 1991*

### **Footnotes:**

1. Khushwant Singh, '*A History of the Sikhs*', Oxford University Press, Vol. II, pp. 266-67)
2. Gopal Singh, '*A History of the Sikh People*', World Book Centre, New Delhi 1988 edition, p.712
3. *Ibid*, p.673
4. *Ibid*, p.687
5. *Ibid*, P.733-34
6. Khushwant Singh, *op. cit.*, Volume II, pp. 293. 304-305