

SIKHISM: GROWTH IN THE SECOND MILLENNIUM

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The Sikh religion is the youngest of the world religions but is recognized as one among the major world religions. It is a revolutionary prophetic religion which emerged over five hundred years ago and is spread over a period of four centuries. The Sikh religion originated with the advent of Guru Nanak (1469-1539) and reached its culmination in the creation of *Khalsa* by Guru Gobind Singh (1699-1708). This paper is an humble attempt to highlight the growth of Sikhism from its origin to the turn of the millennium by illustrating briefly the founder and other Gurus, the scriptures, theological aspects, cultic or liturgical aspects, social-political movements and the future of Sikhism in the present scenario.

1. Founder and Other Sikh Gurus

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) the founder of Sikh religion was born at village Talwandi, now known as Nankana Sahib in Pakistan and belonged to Bedi *gotra* (clan of *Khatri*s). According to the popular legends, Guru Nanak had divine knowledge from the time of his birth and got revelation in Bein stream near Sultanpur in 1499. After that, he started his peregrination towards east, south, north and west and in 1522 settled at Kartarpur where he stayed for 17 years. Guru Nanak's three important precepts are: first, there is no Hindu no Mussalman; second, work hard and share one's earnings; third, an active life is superior to contemplation. Guru Nanak repudiated the orthodox practices and rituals of both communities and stressed on the practice of truthful living. To demolish caste-system he insisted on common kitchen and built the first *dharmsala* or chapel of the Sikhs at Kartarpur.

Guru Angad: (1504-1552), the second Guru, was born at village Matte di Sarai, near Muktsar and his earlier name was Lehna. The name Angad was given by Guru Nanak after appointing him Guru on July 14, 1544. To organise the disciples of Guru Nanak and to secure the individuality of Nanak's mission, he compiled Guru Nanak's memoirs and introduced gurmukhi script consisting of thirty five letters and also

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enlarged and expanded the institution of *Langar* or free kitchen which was already initiated by the first Guru.

Guru Amardas (1479-1574), the third Guru, was born in village Basarke, near Amritsar and succeeded as Guru at the age of 72. To strengthen and propagate the Sikh faith, he established twenty-two *manjis* all over the country. He also laid the foundation of Goindwal (a small town) in 1546 and constructed a *baoli* at Goindwal. A major change was initiated by the third Guru (on the request of his daughter) in the office of Guruship by making it hereditary in the family of the next Guru Ramdas.

Guru Ram Das (1534-1581); the fourth Guru, was popularly known as *Jetha*, the first born. He was the son-in-law of the third Guru and served as Guru for seven years. He laid the foundation of the city of Amritsar, Ramdaspur or Guru Ka Chak and introduced reforms particularly in wedding ceremony and composed a long hymn in four parts which is recited at the time of marriage ceremony.

Guru Arjun (1563-1606), the fifth Guru, was the son of Guru Ramdas and became Guru in 1581, superseding his elder brother Prithi Chand who resented and joined with the Mughal officials. Guru Arjun was the first martyr in Sikhism who suffered torture and death at the age of forty three years and sacrificed himself on 30 May 1606. However, he laid the foundation of Sikh theocracy by compiling the holy scripture, *The Adi Granth*. He laid the foundation of Tarn Taran, a town and completed the holy tank at Amritsar and also shifted his headquarters to Amritsar. He appointed *masands* or collectors in each of the twenty-two provinces to collect funds, and encouraged adventure and enterprise among his followers. During Guru Arjun's period, two important events (Prince Khusro's shelter with the Guru and proposal of marriage of Chandu Shah, Diwan of Lahore's daughter with Guru's son) happened which led to complications, contributing to the first step in military organization.

Guru Hargobind (1595-1644), the sixth Guru, was the son of Guru Arjun. He was born at village Wadali, district Amritsar. He saw the martyrdom of his father and offered armed resistance to the Mughal Empire. He was the first Sikh Guru who wore two swords of *shakti* and *bhakti*, combining in him (*piri*) renunciation and (*miri*) royalty.

Guru Har Rai (1630-1661), the seventh Guru, was the grandson of Guru Hargobind and became Guru at the age of fourteen years. He was too young to involve in fighting and he passed away at the age of thirty years.

Guru Harkrishan (1656-1664), the eighth guru, was the second son of Guru Har Rai. He was ordained Guru at the age of five years, but he passed away, when he was eight years old.

Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675), the ninth guru was the son of Guru Hargobind. He became Guru at the time of Aurangzeb who ordered forcible conversions of Hindus to Islam. To save the Kashmiri Pandits, he sacrificed his life and was beheaded on 11 Nov. 1675.

Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), the tenth Guru, was the son of Guru Tegh Bahadur and was born at Patna. He was fond of literary and artistic activities and had fifty two eminent poets working with him. He incorporated the hymns of Guru Tegh Bahadur in the Holy Granth and installed *Guru Granth Sahib* as the Living Guru. He confronted with the Mughal empire and struck a blow at the power of Aurangzeb. The first battle of Bhangani was fought in 1686 and the second battle was fought at Nadaun in 1687 and the third battle was fought at Kirtipur in 1701. He sacrificed his all sons but refused to embrace Islamic faith. With the creation of Khalsa in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh gave a new shape to the Sikh Religion by imposing a distinct individual and corporate identity to the *Panth*.

In this way, Sikhism evolved from a pacifist religious group into an organized political community, thus embodying the spirit of universal religion as contained in the *Guru Granth* along with the physical form to preserve it. According to Khushwant Singh, 'The two hundred years between Nanak's proclamation of faith (1499) and Gobind's founding of the Khalsa Panth (1699) can be neatly divided into two almost equal parts. In the first hundred years the five gurus pronounced the ideals of a new social order for the Punjab. The second period of a hundred years saw the development of traditions which supplemented this social order.² The distinct religious identity was vouchsafed by the first five Gurus by creating cohesive infrastructure for the community. A new dimension was given to the Sikh community by the sixth Master, Guru Hargobind, who wore the two swords, symbolic of the integration of spiritual authority

(*piri*) and temporal authority (*miri*) in order to control the onslaughts of the Mughal emperors.³

The spirit of the integration of the sacred and the secular was carried on by Guru Gobind Singh, in the creation of khalsa in the year 1699, through the baptismal ceremony of *amrit* (nectar). The Guru had conferred on his followers not only the individual identity expressed by the five external symbols, but also the corporate identity of ethno-religious, ethno-social and ethno-political nature.

As the historians record, the creation of khalsa takes place on 30 March 1699, the day of *Baisakhi*, when addressing to a large gathering and expounding the basic tenets of the Sikh faith, Guru Gobind Singh challenged and asked the audience who will offer their lives for the sake of *dharma*.⁴ The five who offered themselves for *dharma* were called by the Guru as the five beloved ones (*panj pyaras*). The baptism ceremony took place when the five beloved ones were baptized in the order of the khalsa. Dr. Gopal Singh defines the process of baptism as 'the democratic spirit of the faith.'⁵ The five beloved ones were given nectar (*amrit*) made from water and sugar crystals, prepared in an iron bowl and stirred with a two-edged sword and then the Guru himself received the same initiation followed by many thousands from all castes.

The five emblems, prescribed for the order of the khalsa, popularly referred to as the five K's are an indispensable part of the order of khalsa. They are 'symbols of saintliness (*bhagti*), the *keshas*, *kangha* (comb) and *kachha* (short breeches), the latter two being the allied symbols of saintliness, symbolising the virtues of cleanliness and continence. As symbols of strength (*shakti*), he gave them *kirpan* (sword), and *kara* (bracelet), both of pure steel, the latter forming a check on the use of sword hand only for pure, righteous and defensive purposes.'⁶ The distinct philosophy and a new way of life of the khalsa was certainly a deviation from the prevalent Indian and Semitic traditions.

The creation of khalsa was not a simple event in history but was a revolutionary movement with deep inner philosophy, aimed at reconstruction of society by challenging the traditional orthodox practices, social prejudices and political dominance and by offering a new pattern of values based on the ontological principle of the unqualified worship of

One God. The aim of this corporate body of khalsa, was to destroy evil in all its manifestations, even with the use of arms, but the moral strength required for the accomplishment of this task was derived from the spiritual basis. That is why, every member of the khalsa order was conferred with the status of 'Sant-Soldier' and was required to maintain a distinct identity by observing a prescribed code of conduct and by relying on the sovereign authority of *Guru Granth Sahib*.

2. The Sikh Scriptures

The *Adi Granth* or *Granth Sahib*, as it is popularly known was compiled by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjun, in 1604 at Amritsar. It got its title the Guru from the compiler himself and this was confirmed and ceremonially conferred on the book by the last Guru in 1708.⁷ The cosmopolitan spirit of the Sikh religion is explicit in the compilation of *Guru Granth Sahib* by the fifth Guru, who has incorporated the hymns of *bhaktas* and muslim saints in it and accorded them an equal status with the holy compositions of the Gurus. The authorship of the holy scripture can be divided into three categories:

- I. **The Sikh Gurus:** The first five Gurus and the ninth Guru.
- II. **Hindu Bhagats and Muslim Saints:** Jai Dev of Bengal, Nam Dev, Trilochan, Parmanand of Maharashtra, Sadhna of Sindh, Beni, Ramanand of Uttar Pradesh, Dhanna of Rajasthan, Pipa, Sain, Kabir, Ravidas of Uttar Pradesh, Mirabai of Rajasthan, Farid of Punjab, Bhikhan of Uttar Pradesh and Surdas of Oudh.

The hymns of these *bhaktas* and *sufis* represent the four centuries of the Indian religious thought.

- III. **Compositions of Bhattas or Bards:** These compositions are panegyrics in the praise of first five Gurus. The *bhattas* are seventeen in number: Mathra, Jalap, Bal, Harbans, Talya, Salya, Jalya, Bhal, Kalh Sahar, Kal, Jal, Nal, Kirat, Das, Gayand, Sadrang and Bhikha.
- IV. **Other Compositions:** The compositions of men like Mardana, the disciple of Guru Nanak; Sunder, the author of an elegy, the *Ram Kali Sad* and the eulogistic balland (*var*) of Satta and Balwand do not fall within the three above categories.

The arrangement of the contents is in accordance with *Ragas*. The hymns to be sung in a particular *Rag* are placed together and are further arranged as such, *Chaupadas* (four verses), *Ashtpadis* (eight stanzas), special long poem, *Chhants* (six lines verses), special short poem, *Vars* (ballad form) etc. At the end of the *Granth*, the Guru has given an index of all *Ragas* and *Ragnis* and their families. The hymns of the Gurus are uttered in thirty one *Ragas*.

Dasam Granth:

The sacred writings of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh are incorporated in the *Dasam Granth*, which consists of the following eighteen works: *Jap Sahib*, *Akal Ustat*, *Bicitra Natak*, *Candi Caritr I*, *Candi Caritr II*, *Candi di Var*, *Gyan Prabodh*, *Caubis Avatar*, *Mehdi Mir Budh*, *Brahma Avatar*, *Rudra Avatar*, *Sabad Hazare*, *Sri Mukh bak Savaie*, *Khalse di Mahima*, *Sastra Nam Mala*, *Pakhyan Caritr*, *Zafarnama* and the *Hikayats*.

3. Sikh Literature

I. Varan Bhai Gurdas:

Bhai Gurdas was a Sikh theologian who wrote the holy scripture '*The Adi Granth*' at the dictation of Guru Arjun. Besides, he was the author of 39 *vars* and 556 *kaubits* (couplets). His *varan* are described by Guru Arjun Dev as a key to understand the Holy Scripture.

II. Biographies of the Sikh Gurus:

These are based on the historical accounts of:

Janam Sakhis (birth-stories written about the lives of the Sikh Gurus in simple anecdote, parable and miracles).

Gurbilases (recreating the lives of the Gurus in verse). These *granth*s are: *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*, A.D. 1718; Koer Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi, 10*, A.D. 1751; Sukkha Singh's *Gurbilas Dasvin Patshahi*, A.D. 1797, *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka*, A.D. 1769, containing rapid poetic accounts of the ten Gurus.

Mahima Prakash, A.d. 1776, composed by lineal descendant of Guru Amar Das. Bhai Santokh Singh's *Sri Gurpratap Suraj Granth*, A.D. 1834. This massive work depicts the lives of the ten Gurus in braj poetry.

Textual Sources regarding the Ethics of the Sikhs:

There are injunctions from *Sainapati's Gur Sobha*, formal codes of conduct by Bhai Chaupa Singh and Prahlad Singh, *Tankhahnama* of Bhai Nand Lal and the Sikh Code of Conduct (*Rehat-Maryada*) compiled and issued by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee on 3 Feb. 1945.

There are also exegetical and interpretative works of some eminent modern Sikh scholars such as Bhai Kahn Singh, Bhai Jodh Singh, Prof. Teja Singh, Bhai Vir Singh and Prof. Sahib Singh. Bhai Kahn Singh was one of the few Sikh scholars who played a significant role in shaping the recent conceptions of Sikh religion and history. He was the active member of Singh Sabha Movement. Besides other works, he edited three volumes i.e. *Gurmat Prabhakar*, *Gurmat Sudhakar*, *Gurmat Martand*, to explore the contours of separate Sikh identity. Bhai Jodh Singh was a theologian and philosopher and through his writings viz., *Sikh Philosophy*, *Gurmat Nirney*, etc., he defended and explored the beliefs and injunctions of Sikhism. Prof. Sahib Singh, who belonged to the exegetical school known as Singh Sabha Pranali, interpreted in ten volumes the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

4. Theological Aspect

Sikhism believes in the monotheistic concept of One God Who is both Transcendent and Immanent; Unmanifest and Manifest; Impersonal and Personal; *Nirguna* and *Sarguna*. In relation to world, God is defined as Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer, having all metaphysical attributes such as Omnipotence, Infinity and Eternity. He is also described as Sovereign, Ineffable, Fearless and Benevolent.

God is the sole creator of the universe. The state before creation of the universe is described as *dhundhukara*⁸ or indescribable darkness, when there was nothing but God was in an Unmanifest Absolute State (*Sunn-Samadhi*)⁹ and the whole creation came into being due to God's desire (*bhava*).¹⁰ The wide expanse was created with one Utterance.¹¹ Though there is no certainty about the beginning of creation, yet the process of

creation is explicitly mentioned in the *bani*.¹² Sikhism repudiates the Vedantic concept of *maya* as a divine energy of God and uses the word *maya* in the sense of misappropriation of reality. *Maya*, in Sikhism is neither an independent entity nor is co-existent with God.

Man, in Sikhism is regarded as the highest creation of God. The mystery of man's life and the ultimate goal of his life is explicitly stated in the speculative hymn of *Rag Gauri*:

"The Man is born and then he dies;
O, where from does he come?
Yea, whence he cometh and whither goeth he?
Why is he bound down, how is he released?
How doth he merge in the Great Peace of the Eternal Lord?"¹³

Here arises the question about the origin of man, the purpose of his life, cause of his bondage and the way of his redemption. Man's birth and death are due to man's desires. Those who contemplate on the divine word remain detached from worldly entanglements and can get emancipation.¹⁴ It is admitted that human life has come after passing through innumerable existences, the number of eighty-four lakhs, which neither increases nor decreases, is acknowledged in *Guru Granth Sahib*.¹⁵

The main impediment between man and God is man's assertive nature i.e. *haumai*, feeling of I-am-ness which leads to duality and causes confusion. So *haumai* creates barriers between man and realisation of *hukam* (Divine Will). Man, in ignorance, cannot understand the Divine Writ which is inscribed on his forehead and cannot be obliterated. The cycle of birth and death continues and in every birth, man goes on performing action in accordance with his past deeds. These accumulated deeds (*kirt karma*) determine man's present life and his way of performance of action. But the law of *karma*, in Sikhism, is not predestination or fate.

The Sikh religion repudiates the speculations of Indian thinkers about the future plane of existence and stresses on the need to arrange empirical life in accordance with the Divine Will. Heaven and hell are just the mental states to be experienced here and now. The immortality of soul is also conceived in the sense of realization of eternity of values in the temporal world as well as to be one with the Infinite in the midst of

finitude. The ultimate end is to rediscover the limitless spiritual potentialities inherent in man and therefore, the stress is on the transcendence of man from self-centredness to God-centredness and the identification of his finite consciousness with the cosmic consciousness.

The preliminary step to such attainment is self-purification which, indeed, is possible through love, devotion and faith in God. Being imbued in the Divine Being through the constant remembrance of Divine Name, with the help of an emancipator (*Guru*) and by the grace of God, man can eliminate all impediments in the way of spiritual growth and can become aware of the divine presence within himself. In this way, being saturated by Divine Name, man reaches at the stage of *wismad* i.e. of awe and wonder at the vision of the greatness of God. Therefore, spiritual consummation lies in the transcendence of ethical to the spiritual level.

5. Cultic or Liturgical Aspects

The nucleus of Sikh community living is based on the ontological principles laid down by the Gurus. The basic tenets of Sikh philosophy are belief in the oneness of God; belief in the teachings of ten Gurus; belief in *Guru Granth Sahib*; belief in the necessity of *amrit*, *khande di pahul*. The main pillars of Sikh thought are daily contemplation and prayer (*nam-japna*), work hard (*kirat karna*) and sharing one's wealth with others (*Vand Chhakna*).

The Holy Scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib* was bestowed with the status of Guru by Guru Gobind Singh and all the members of the community are bound to worship the holy scripture alone, to seek spiritual as well as secular guidance. The message of the Gurus as embedded in the *Granth* is 'ethico-spiritual' as well as 'socio-cultural'. The role of man from birth to death and as a working man in the different social strata is taken in purview to instil in him a message to live practical life and to expand his self in order to gain cosmic awareness. The Holy Scripture is installed in every Gurdwara and certain ceremonial practices are observed in the morning and the evening to pay obeisance to the Holy Granth as Guru. For instance, *Palki Sahib*, *Maharaja ji di Aswari*, *Chaur* and *rumalas* (robes) containing three pieces, one proper *rumala*, the central piece and two side pieces i.e. the *palkan* are changed daily in accordance with the singing of a hymn appropriate to the ceremony.¹⁶

As concerned the scripture, often *akhand path* (non-stop recitation), *khulla path* (not bound by time) and *saptahik paths* (recitation spreading over seven days) are performed to commemorate happy occasions as well as occasions of grief and death. Every time, *ardas* (prayer) is done not only for the individual purposes but also for the welfare of the community as well as for the whole mankind. After *ardas*, the *karah prasad* (sweet candy) is served to all present in the congregation without any discrimination. This *prasad* is prepared in every Gurdwara, by concerned authorities and is sold at the counter set quite close to the entrance. The recitation of hymns in musical ragas known as *kirtan* is performed daily and after every ceremony.

Gurdwara is also a special feature of the Sikh Community. The word gurdwara was first used by Guru Hargobind, meaning thereby home or abode of the Guru, where *Guru Granth Sahib* is installed. The congregational worship and *Guru Granth Sahib* are essential features of the Sikh Community.¹⁷ A theo-political status to gurdwaras, especially to the Golden Temple has been accorded since the times of Guru Hargobind who installed the *Akal Takht* adjacent to the Golden Temple, to set up an example of the integration of spiritual and temporal authority. Besides the Golden Temple, there are historical gurdwaras and community gurdwaras, built up by the Sikhs to meet their social and religious needs. The historical gurdwaras are built on important sites in the Sikh history, viz., *Sis Ganj* in Delhi, where Guru Tegh Bahadur was martyred and *Keshgarh* at Anandpur, where Guru Gobind Singh installed the Khalsa. However, the five gurdwaras have special sanctity and are known as *takhtas* (thrones of the guru). These are the *Akal Takht* at Golden Temple, Amritsar which is sovereign and supreme seat and from where important edicts concerning community are issued; *Patna Sahib*, the birth-place of Guru Gobind Singh, *Anandpur Sahib*, the origination place of khalsa panth, *Nander Sahib*, where Guru Gobind Singh became one with the Infinite, relinquishing his body and *Damdama Sahib*.

The central gurdwara for the Sikh community, all over the world, is Golden Temple where recitation of *bani* and *kirtan* is performed the whole day. Every gurdwara is open to all, irrespective of caste, creed and status. One has to take off one's shoes, wash hands and feet and cover head as a token of respect for the Guru. Everybody can participate in the *kirtan* and

ardas (prayer) and can take offerings (*prasad*) and eat cooked food in the community kitchen (*langar*).

All the community ceremonies, festivals and *gurpurbs* are celebrated in the gurdwaras. The main festivals celebrated by the Sikh community are *Baisakhi*, *Diwali* and *Hola Mohalla*. *Baisakhi* is new year's day in Punjab and is practised by Hindus at Haridwar, Guru Arjun Dev ordained the celebration of *Baisakhi* at Harimandir.¹⁸ This festival is social-political and religious occasion and is important for the Sikh community, being associated with the origination of khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh. The festival of *Diwali* was celebrated first by Baba Buddha to commemorate Guru Hargobind's release from the imprisonment of the Mughals, in the Gwalior Fort.¹⁹

The Sikh community celebrates three important anniversaries or *gurpurbs* i.e. Guru Nanak's birthday, Guru Gobind Singh's birthday and martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev. *Guru Granth Parkash Divas* is also celebrated. Besides these annual celebrations, monthly celebrations viz. *sangrand* and *masaya* (*amavas*) are also observed. The first day of the month, according to the Bikrami Calendar is observed as auspicious occasion and people used to visit temple and take bath in the tank to ensure prosperity throughout the month. This practice was in process even during the period of the Gurus. On *amavas* (moonless night), people have dip in the tank and this practice continues since Guru's days.²⁰

The Sikh community is bound strictly by the instructions laid down by the Gurus in the observance of ceremonies and modes of worship. Besides *kirtan*, one more significant feature of congregational worship is *ketha* (discourse), lectures, *Diwan* etc. organized on special occasions. The function of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committée is to organize *diwans*, lectures on *Gurbani* and on the life of Gurus and events of Sikh history especially during *gurpurab* celebrations. It has also set up Sikh missionary schools and colleges, Sikh religious libraries, Sikh museums. To serve mankind, it has set up hospitals, *serais* or *dharmshalas* on the name of the Gurus.

To maintain the community discipline and to decide about collective decisions, executive council of five chosen ones is made, who represent the whole community and all important matters are referred to this council

which takes decision by *sarab-samiti* (unanimity) or *bahu-samiti* (majority-decision). Those who have failed to keep the discipline, have to undergo penance (*tankhah*) which is some act of physical nature such as washing utensils, cleaning the floor etc, which the penitent must perform himself and must accept without any question.

The liturgical texts from the Holy Scripture such as *Japuji*, *Jap*, ten *Savayyas*, *Sodar*, *Rahiras* and *Kirtan Sohila* are meant for daily recitation by the individual members of the khalsa and *Sukhmani* and *Asa di Var*, are recited and sung collectively every morning in the Sikh gurdwaras.

6. Socio-Religious Movements

In the course of history, certain religious movements emerged within the folds of Sikhism, which either disappeared completely due to their inability to keep pace with the basic tenets of Sikhism or have separated from the parent body. There are several instances such as the *Udasis*, the *Meenas*, the *Dheermaliaas*, the *Raam Raayyas*, the *Suthra Shaahees*, the *Dewaanaas*, the *Mehman Shaahees*, the *Gulaab daasees* etc. There is also found deviational tendency among some Sikh missionary movements as the *Nirmalas*, the *Sewaa Panthees*, the *Nirankaarees*, the *Naamdhaarees* and the *Radhasoamis*. These missions, though deem themselves to be Sikhs, yet their assertion about their separate identity is apparent.²¹

However, these movements emerged as reformative movements. For instance, the Nirankari movement, with its founder Baba Dayal (1783-1854) rejected the idolatry and stressed on the worship of Formless God. This movement emerged along with simultaneous emergence of Christian and Arya Samajists and was therefore became popular, as an indigenous agent of reformation. The differences between orthodox Sikhism and the *Nirankaris* are limited to the latter's worship of Gurus other than the ten gurus recognized by the Sikhs and also their disapproval of the militant khalsa. The *Namdari* movement was founded by Balak Singh (1797-1862) and Baba Ram Singh (1816-1884) was leader of this movement who stressed on the practice of name and his followers are also known as *kukas* (shouter) because in moments of ecstasy, they dance and cry out. They are distinct from the Sikhs due to their puritanical mode of living and belief in the living Guru. The Radhasoami sect was founded by Shiv Dayal (1818-1878) but the main sect was split into two after the death of the founder.

The main centre is at Agra and a branch started by Baba Jaimal Singh (1839-1913) is at Beas, near Amritsar. The difference of this sect from Sikhism is the belief in a living guru, stress on contemplation of *nam* silently not in *kirtan*, and disbelief in baptism (*pahul*) and militant rows of the khalsa.²²

The most significant movement known as the Singh Sabha Movement emerged in 1870's with the aim to reconstruct the socio-religious concerns of Sikh community. The aim of these leaders was to define Sikh identity and to restore to the Sikhs a distinct status.²³ In its earlier phase, this movement was aloof from politics but soon it founded the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902 which dominated the political scene in Punjab during the first two decades of the twentieth century. It played significant role for bringing consciousness of distinct Sikh identity among the masses. The aim of the Chief Khalsa Diwan was to promote the spiritual as well as social welfare of the Khalsa Panth.

The main problem of the Sikh religio-politics is its imperative to preserve its separate identity. This quest for distinct identity has become a challenge and its origin can be traced back to Arya Samaj Movement which attempted to absorb Sikhism into the Hindu fold. The Singh Sabha Movement arose as a reaction and the Chief Khalsa Diwan was created on the similar lines. The Sikh Educational Conference was held in 1908 and Anand Marriage Bill was passed in 1909, stating the legislation of marriage ceremony according to traditional Sikh rites. In 1920, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee was set up to manage all Gurdwaras and in 1925, the Sikh Gurdwara Act was passed, which placed all the Gurdwaras in the custody of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). The consciousness of distinct identity and the awareness of preservation of heritage are the result of religio-cultural revolution of Sikhism. This demand for the preservation of distinct Sikh identity was set up in the late twentieth century, in the political goals of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, which was approved by the Shiromani Akali Dal in 1973 and the ultimate objective was to secure the pre-eminence of the khalsa.

The Sikh identity is two fold viz., the individual identity of form on the religious level and the corporate identity of an ethos on the socio-political level. In the Sikh history, the identity crisis has passed through

three phases, first, after the loss of power in 1849 and it took the form of physical survival, second, with the emergence of Arya Samajist Movement and found reaction in the formation of Singh Sabha Movement in 1873 and third phase is going on since 1947 and that is the minority issue and this was sought to be resolved by securing numerical majority in the linguistically reorganized Punjab in 1966.²⁴

The unique tenets of the Sikh polity are *sangat* (holy congregation), *Guru Granth* and *Khalsa Panth* (the spiritual and temporal authority), the *Panj Piyaras*, (plural executive), the *Gurmata* (collective will of the people) and the *Sarbat khalsa* (democratic and egalitarian polity).²⁵ The practice of participating in the holy congregation (*sangat*) and passing of resolutions on the important religious matters (*Gurmatta*) at the *Akal Takht* began in 1745, on the eve of Diwali.²⁶ The declaration of the Holy Congregation as the *Sarbat Khalsa* or a theo-political body took place in November 1760 and this institution is recognized till the present times.²⁷ The significant issues of the Sikh Panth relating to socio-religious and political problems were discussed in the *Sarbat Khalsa* which used to meet at *Akal Takht* on the occasions of Diwali and Baisakhi.

7. Sikhs in India and Abroad

The Sikhs, being two percent of the Indian population, constitute numerically the smallest minorities of India. Though a small minority community, the Sikhs have played a significant role in the national movement and for the freedom of India from the British Empire. According to historical data, about eighty percent sacrifices are made by the Sikhs for the national movement viz., out of one hundred twenty one persons who were hanged for revolutionary activities, ninety three were Sikhs and out of two thousand six hundred and forty six persons who were convicted for life, two thousand one hundred and forty were Sikhs.²⁸

The Sikhs are found throughout the world and their number is increasing in U.S.A. and U.K. and in many parts of Australia, South-East Asia, Africa and Canada. Most of the Sikh immigrants are professional and technical workers. Recently, interest in Sikh studies, from variant perspectives, has been increasing at the academic level. There are reports from several universities in Canada which have started courses for Sikh studies at the undergraduate and graduate levels. In 1980, the University of

British Columbia at Vancouver established a chair of the Sikh studies and in Canada, the University of Toronto has awarded the first Ph.D. in Sikh Studies.²⁹ The world-wide popularity and recognition of the Sikh religion is apparent from reports of conferences held to celebrate the tercentenary of the Khalsa Panth. At U.S.A., a three day 'Sikh Renaissance Conference' was held in 1995 and again in 1999. The Khalsa Tricentennial Celebration was also held at San Jose State University, California and it was organized by the Department of Foreign Languages in collaboration with *Charhdi Kala* Sikh Cultural Centre of San Jose. Another report reveals the celebrations of the tercentenary of Khalsa Panth at Royal Albert Hall on 25 April, 1999 in which besides other dignitaries, the guest of honour was the Prince of Wales. At Birmingham, an international conference was held in which two thousand delegates participated and Prime Minister, Tony Blair addressed the audience and justified the policy based on Guru Gobind Singh's teachings.³⁰

The above stated reports of celebrations and functions held abroad by the Sikh organizations reveal the popularity of Sikh faith in the geographical sense. But the Sikhs settled abroad have to face certain difficulties also due to their distinctive appearance. Often the Sikhs are excluded from the armed forces, police posts, sports teams and other important realms of American life. They are also misunderstood due to their distinctive appearance. For instance, during the American hostage crisis of Iran, the Sikhs suffered due to misplaced prejudices and hostility against the Iranians.³¹ The similar events happened recently after the air-attack on World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001 and Sikhs were attacked due to misunderstanding about the Sikhs as Afgans.

8. Future of Sikhism

The study of the origin and development of Sikhism reveals the fact that Sikhism has passed through many critical phases. The confrontation with the Mughal Empire began during the period of the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, who has sacrificed his life and was the first martyr in the Sikh history. An organized and armed resistance to the Mughal Empire was made by the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind. The ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life to avert the forcible conversions of Hindus to Islam. The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, confronted with the Mughal Empire and sacrificed his four sons. After the tenth Guru, it was his

disciple Banda Singh Bahadur, who took the command and confronted with the Mughal troops. Many attempts were made by the imperial troops to suppress and annihilate the Sikhs.³²

The future of any religion depends on its distinctive philosophy and ideology. Sikhism is a revelatory prophetic religion which stresses on the reconstruction of socio-religious order on the ontological basis, repudiating the idolatrous, formalism and orthodox practices. Its mission is not to make conversions but to bring back the followers of any religion to their original faith. It emphasizes on the philosophy of world-affirmation and life-affirmation and not in the other-worldly life. The uniqueness of the Sikh doctrines, its distinctive ideology and cosmopolitan spirit is gaining popularity in the world faiths.

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