LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Case for the Sikhs

The Sikh question comes up before the Advisory Committee on minorities on the 11th of May that the Sikh case has no so far been truly appreciated is apparent. Recently, Jathedar Pritam Singh, Gojran Acting President of the Shiromani Akali Dal, had to contradict some of the more serious accusations. The Jathedar denied i) that the Sikhs want to carve out a separate home land for themselves ii) that the Sikhs want to push their brethren, the Hindus, out of the East Punjab. iii) that the Sikhs intend any violence against the Government of the non-Sikhs or that they wish to threaten the Government in any manner. iv) that the Sikhs are making any secret or revolutionary plans.

During the British period the Sikhs were recognised a minority like the Muslims. They were given statutory representation in the Central and Provincial Legislatures and the services. The Indian National Congress and its leaders also accepted the Sikhs as an important minority community in India and assured them of safeguarding their interests in any further setup. There were occasions when the Congress made definite pledge to them as a community. The Sikhs were recognised the second important minority by all the parties in all arrangements leading upto the transfer of power to India in August 1947. The Sikhs got the
Punjab, where they were chiefly concentrated, partitioned to join with India. The Sikhs left the western part, had to migrate to India 'enmasses'. With his background of communal rights and assurances, conflicts and partitions, the Sikhs began their existence in the new India. The Sikhs were recognised a minority in the new setup too. The brochure, 'India's minorities' issued by the publications division of the Ministry of information and broadcasting (1948), after discussing some general principles on 'in the Indian Union, Muslims, Sikhs, Christian, Parsees and Anglo Indians are the minorities'. The Sikhs by virtue of their religion, language and special position in the East Punjab are a distinct entity in the country of the state.

In the draft constitution of India reservation of seats for the Muslims, the Schedule Cast and the Indian Christians has been provided for a period of ten years to began with. Provision has also been made to the satisfaction of the Anglo-Indians in the matter of services, education and representation in the legislators. The President of Union and the governor of the States shall nominate representatives of the Anglo-Indians to the lower houses in the Centre and in the States respectively, if they fail to secure adequate representation in the general elections. The Parsees did not ask for any special treatment. The question of determining safe-guards for the Sikhs was left over by the Advisory Committee on minorities. This was, perhaps, in view of the special nature of the problem. The interval gave rise to remour and controversy. The Sikhs put forward from various platforms. And in various forms their 'demands' which were described as communal and anti national by members of the
majority community and their press, especially in the East Punjab. Sikhs are in no way separatists. The simple fact that they have certain demands to make of the government does not render them enemies of the state. Their demands should be studied on their merits. Sikh demands, reduced to their essential, are very simple. Giani Kartar Singh has summed them up very ably in a representation, he has submitted to some Cabinet ministers of the East Punjab to be passed on to the Advisory Committee on minorities. The principle underlying these demands have, in one form or another been accepted in the case of other minorities in India. Seats in the central and provincial legislatures have been reserved for the Muslims and their quota in the services fixed. Nomination will provide representation to Anglo-Indians if they fail to achieve it in the open elections. To deny the Sikh Scheduled Castes what has been allow-ed to the Hindu Scheduled Castes will be in justice. That will mean a definite disability attaching to a people professing a particular faith. Other wise, economically and educationally the Sikh Scheduled Castes. That the redistribution of Provincial boundaries on linguistic basis is a democratic and scientific principle is recognized by all practical. Practical consideration may prevent its adoption for some time marking out the Punjabi-speaking areas of the East Punjab with autonomy in mattes of language, education and culture is probably the best and most scientific solution of the Sikh problem. The extremists demand of separate electorate has been give up. And more than anything else, the Sikhs need sympathy. Their problems and difficulties should be understood and appreciated sympathetically. It is no enough to tell them that they are selfish and sectarian. Their fears
and anxieties should be allayed. That is possible only if they are approached with understanding. The government and the majority community will win their confidence by doing that.

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