Chapter 4

VIRTUES

4.1: Prolegomena

It is now necessary for us to know the chief forms into which the moral life of the unified self ought to express itself. Historically, an answer in this direction, from Pythagoras onwards, has been in terms of virtues. The term virtue which earlier meant manliness has, however, come to be understood more generally as qualities of the moral person. The modern ethical dialogue appears to have continued this usage with a slight increased emphasis on action, in that the virtues are the qualities of self as expressed in action. It is in terms of virtues that the moral person expresses himself.

In different schools of Indian Philosophy a wide variety of terms is used to convey this ethical meaning. Thus we see that in Nyaya, Vatsyayana has used 'subha' (leading to dharma, i.e. righteousness), while Patanjali has used 'yamas'. Among the Jains 'punya' and 'dharma' convey almost the same meaning.

In some of the older Indian literature the term 'guna' is used to mean "good qualities, virtues, merits, excellences."\(^1\) It is this term guna along with others like 'sift'

\(^1\)Monier Monier Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 357.
(from the Arabic language) and 'sheel' (which might have a reference to the Buddhist terminology, "sila" in the meanings of good conduct) that are used in Sikhism to convey the equivalent meaning of virtues.¹ In Sikhism, guna is understood to mean virtues and good qualities of the self. The contrary of guna in Sikhism is 'augun' (evil quality) and contradictory is 'vingun' (absence of guna). Let us now examine views about guna in Sikhism. We may first briefly refer to the general characteristics and then take up the various virtues for detailed examination and analysis.

4.2: Virtues in general in Sikhism

The importance of the "guna" is emphasized in the Adi Granth by all the Gurus. Guru Nanak says that "as many are the vices, so many are the chains round one's neck. One removeth vice with virtue, for virtue is our only friend."² What is the definition of virtue in Sikhism? The statement from which we may infer this appears to have been offered by Guru Nanak in the next stanza when he says, "Let thy mind be the farmer and deeds the farming; and let thy body be the farm; water it with effort. Let the spiritual (Nam) be the seed, and contentment the furrowing, and let the sense be of

²Adi Granth, Sorath M.i (4-i), p. 595.
humility. If thou doest deeds of love, the seed will sprout and fortunate will then be thy home."¹ Now, if we except, for the moment, the final object of virtue—the realization of the supreme ideal—we can see that by the use of the allegory "mind, the farmer and deeds, the farming" the virtues sought to be conveyed are what Sidgwick has called, "qualities exhibited in right conduct."² Virtues mentioned in the above list, such as, contentment, humility and love will be taken up later in this chapter. For the present the stress on the need to cultivate virtues may be mentioned. Guru Nanak, in one of his compositions, declares categorically that "devotion without virtue is impossible."³ This stress on morality is clearly noticeable throughout the teachings of the Gurus.

The Gurus also regard virtues as qualities essential to endear the self to the Divine. It is, as Guru Nanak says, "Charming one's love with the charm of virtue."⁴ It is in this sense that "furrowing and fencing" would help in the sprouting of the spiritual seed. In the terminology we have been using so far it would lead to the realization of the

¹Ibid., Sorath M.1 (1-2), p. 595.
³Adi Granth, Japji (21), p. 4 ("Vin gun keete bhagat na hoi").
⁴Ibid., Tilang M.1 (7-1), p. 725.
"Sachiara-hood" (Real Self).

The virtues, according to the Gurus, may be learnt and cultivated through social communication with the virtuous. This is brought out by Guru Nanak very well in one of his utterances, in which he says, "In the society of the holy, one becometh holy, and one runneth after virtue, forsaking his sins." At yet another place he remarks, "If my friends are blest with virtues, let us share some with them. Yea, share we should the virtues with our friends and shed our sins." This notion of "sharing virtues" is in fact and in general, an aspect of sharing socially. It has vast implications social as well as educational. We have already briefly touched upon the educational aspect in the chapter on "Moral Standard" and the social aspect will be taken up for extensive examination in the chapter on the social ethics. Here it may suffice to take notice that virtues have social implications as well in addition to their value as personal qualities of the possessor.

Should a man be virtuous, it may be asked, in order to be so noticed by others? Should he get discouraged if his virtues attract no notice? The Guru teaches that a person need not feel discouraged in his moral and spiritual endeavour if he feels that his virtues are not being

---

1Ibid., Asa M.1 (7-5), p. 414.
2Ibid., Rag Suhi (3-1-4), p. 766.
appreciated. Guru Nanak says, "Virtue is priceless, it can be bought not at a stall, and it is weighed where the weights are whole and virtue weighteth its weight." This is meant to encourage the release of the strenuous mood in the individual. The person is assured of the great value of virtue even when it does not appear to be deservedly appreciated.

However, in spite of this emphasis on virtues, we do not find at any one place an exhaustive list of virtues or qualities involved in right conduct. As is the case with much of the other similar literature, in the Adi Granth, too, we come across the treatment of virtues here and there and in order to understand the complete meaning one has to refer to different passages at different places. In the present chapter, those virtues which are held very high in the Adi Granth, and receive support elsewhere also, have been brought together with their meanings. However, some excellences which have more social implications, or relate to social relations, such as altruism and the like, have been examined in the chapter on social ethics. The list here is representative of the qualities generally held to be the indicative of moral excellence. It includes: wisdom, truthfulness, temperance, courage, justice, humility and contentment. The list is rather broad-based and embraces almost all of the moral virtues.

Ibid., Var of Maru, Shaloka M.1 (1), p. 1087.
We shall analyse the various aspects of these virtues as explained in Sikhism as well as direct our attention to the various historical developments which are reflected in an increased stress on some one aspect of a virtue.

4.3: Wisdom

Wisdom, as a fundamental virtue, plays a key role in the ethics of the Sikhs. The terms which are generally used to denote wisdom and the wise man are 'gian' and 'giani', respectively. But other terms such as 'mut', mun, 'budh' and 'bibek budh' are used also to convey the ideal of wisdom or the sense of discrimination.

What is wisdom? Which knowledge should be considered wisdom? Can we call such person a wise man as does not practise wisdom, in the sense that his actions do not reflect his wisdom? These questions are important in order to understand the nature and the scope of wisdom. Guru Nanak shows keen appreciation of the need to explain wisdom as he understood it. He, therefore, takes up this question in "Japji", a composition in the Adi Granth. The problem is examined in great detail from the various aspects. Guru Nanak shows wisdom to be "a comprehensive point of view as indicated in the actions of a man". He lays down three-fold steps for the cultivation of wisdom and then these steps are further seen to deal with the various aspects of knowledge.
The three steps are: "sunnia" (hearing), "mannia" (reflection) and "ek dhyana" (concentration, assimilation or synthesis). Let us analyse these three steps and find out their contents.

(i) "Sunnia" (hearing), as a way of acquiring wisdom, occurs first. What should a seeker hear about? In reply to this question, Guru Nanak devotes four separate stanzas to "sunnia":

(a) The first stanza dealing with "sunnia" requires the person to hear about (i) the lives of the realized persons and (ii) the various aspects of the world.

(b) The second stanza includes the hearing by the seeker of (i) the contents of higher consciousness such as that of gods, and the mystery of higher consciousness within himself. (ii) He hears of the various experiences of the higher consciousness such as those recorded in "Shastras, Smritis and Vedas" ("Sunnia sasat simirit Ved"). What is the effect on man of all this hearing? Guru Nanak says that this hearing leads to the expansion of the consciousness of the seeker himself. ("Bhagata sada vigas"). It also lifts him above evil and suffering ("Dukh pap ka nas").

1Adi_Granth, Japji (VIII), p. 2.
2Ibid., Japji (IX), p. 3.
(c) In the third stanza Guru Nanak requires the seeker to hear about the moral principles and learn about such fundamental moral principles as wisdom, contentment or purification. He hears about virtues which ought to be cultivated by the perfect man.

(d) In the fourth stanza the seeker hears about the practical application of wisdom by the various leaders. He acquires the knowledge of how these leaders helped others and guided persons at times of difficulty.

We are now in a better position to say what forms the contents of these four aspects of knowledge of which the seeker hears and learns about. We have found that the programme of hearing includes learning about the world and the man and recognizing higher consciousness in others and within one's own self and knowing about the moral principles and their practical application in the lives of those persons who have lived wisely and guided others.

A critical question may be posed here. Is it enough for the seeker to hear and accept all the preceding knowledge on the testimony of some one else? Hans Reichenbach, the scientist, as quoted by Ruth Reyna has aptly said, in a different context, "He who searches for truth must not appease his urge by giving himself up to the narcotic of belief."  

\[\text{Ibid., Japji (X), p. 3.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., Japji (XI), p. 3.}\]
In case wisdom is taken to end with 'hearing' only, we may consider such a view as an authoritarian approach. The fact that most of the learning today generally conforms to this pattern of 'hearing' only would in no way deter us from still calling it authoritarianism. This process may indeed be helpful to a person to know about the acquirements of the realized selves. But, would we be justified in calling such a person, who has acquired the knowledge merely on the testimony of others, a wise man? Here we sense an omission. Is the seeker not required to reflect on all that he has heard? Would not this reflection help him in the transformation of his understanding and make him a wise man? Guru Nanak shows his concern for this requirement and devotes to "manna" (reflection) an equal number of (four) separate stanzas in continuation of the above statement on "sunnia". The term 'manna' is traceable to the Sanskrit word manana, meaning reflection.¹

(2) As already stated "manna", as the second step of wisdom, now occupies the attention of Guru Nanak. The problem is analysed in four stanzas, as follows:

¹(a) Monier Monier Williams, op. cit., p. 809.


He renders "manan" as "thoughtful, careful thinking, reflection ..."
(a) In the first stanza about "Mannia" (reflection)\(^1\) Guru Nanak cautions the seeker that the process of reflection cannot be stated completely and that any one who promises to make such a description would have to concede the inadequacy of his attempt later. This failure to describe the whole process of reflection stems from the fact that the possibilities involved in reflection are vast and infinite. After this initial observation, however, Guru Nanak proceeds to describe the process of reflection.

(b) The second stanza\(^2\) tells us that it is through reflection that awareness, mind and intellect are fashioned and sharpened. The seeker is then able to realize the true nature of reality and thus avoid the wrong path. At another place in the Adi Granth Guru Amardas refers to this disposition to discriminate between reality and falsehood as "Bibek Budh". This awareness of the path ensures that the person after death does not go through the process of transmigration.

(c) In the third stanza about reflection\(^3\) Guru Nanak says that this reflection removes all the hinderances from the path of the seeker. A man of reflection receives great honour. All his waywardness and hesitation is gone. He now walks on a straight path.

---

\(^1\)Adi Granth, Japji (XII), p. 3.
\(^2\)Ibid., Japji (XXIII), p. 3.
\(^3\)Ibid., Japji (XIV), p. 3.
And here the Guru makes a very important observation. He says that this man endowed with reflection does not break away from the social context. He continues to perform moral acts (dharam).

(d) In the fourth and last stanza dealing with reflection we are told that this man of reflection realizes salvation ("Mokh Dwar"). But the Guru promptly adds that the person now engages himself in altruistic activity. The reflection has shown the seeker that one spirit runs through all. The whole of humanity may now appear to him as one family. He, therefore, takes up the task of helping the entire family of mankind. He, not only realizes the ideal himself, but helps all others with their task (tarai tare). His activity becomes saturated with the aim of helping others. He indeed is a wise man, a man of knowledge. The wisdom lies in the depth and comprehensiveness of his realization and is indicated in his altruistic activity.

(3) We now come to the third aspect of this knowledge, namely, "Ek Dhayan" which may be rendered as single-minded contemplation. It indicates the assimilation and synthesis of the knowledge acquired both from hearing and reflection (sunnai and mania). We find that dhayaa (contemplation) occurs even while the Guru discusses the various aspects of

---

1Ibid., Japji (XV), p. 3.
2Ibid., Japji (XVI), p. 3.
knowledge by hearing ("Sunnia lagai sehaj dhayan"). The need to synthesize and assimilate knowledge is thus stressed by Guru Nanak through this third aspect of knowledge. The synthesis, thus, is a constituent of the knowledge itself.

It may be interesting to mention here that this treatment of wisdom has a remarkable similarity to the notion of wisdom and knowledge in Vedanta. Madananda Misra, who is credited with being perhaps the oldest and the most systematic expositor of Vedanta, regards svarana (hearing) and manana (reflection) and "nididhyasana (direct self realization) as the three aspects of knowledge. However, there is some difference with respect to the content of the two aspects, namely, "sunnai" and "mannai". Knowledge about the world occupies an important position in Sikhism, whereas in Vedanta, this knowledge appears to be characterised as inferior.

**Disagreement about the interpretation of manna as reflection**

Before we proceed further, it is necessary to clarify a controversy which arises about the interpretation of manna as reflection as adopted by us here. The traditional interpretation of manna by various scholars of Sikhism has been, in most or all the cases, in the sense of 'belief' or

---

1 *Ibid., Japji (X), p. 2.*

'believing', or sometimes as 'obedience'. We thus find Macauliffe, Bishan Singh, Sahib Singh and recently Gopal Singh rendering "mania" as 'belief' or 'obedience'.

But these scholars advance no reason for the interpretation of mania in terms of belief or obedience. However, in one case, Gopal Singh briefly says in his translation that he prefers to render mania as belief since it is used at another place in the same sense (of belief). However, an examination of this other passage, cited by the scholar, does not establish that even there it is used in the sense of belief and not 'reflection'.

The argument against this rendition of mania as belief is that all the four stanzas dealing with mania are rendered meaningless if we accept mania as belief. If it was to be understood as belief Guru Nanak could have said simply in one line (after the stanzas dealing with "sunnia") that seeker should believe all that he has heard. The matter would have ended there. But in this event Guru Nanak would

5 Ibid., p.4.
6 Adi Granth, Japji (XXI), p. 5.
have left the Sikhs with a sort of a dogmatic belief, accepted without any reflection, which eventuality he avoids by devoting four stanzas to reflection. Secondly, it may also be asked whether these scholars, who render mansai as belief, would be willing to maintain that all that which is mentioned in the stanzas dealing with hearing (sunnia) should be believed without reflection. It may be added here that the Guru has said that the seeker should hearken to experiences from almost all quarters.

This in itself shows great catholicity of the Gurus as well as the comprehensiveness of knowledge they had in mind. So it may be asked whether these scholars would accept the position that the seeker should 'believe' all that is handed down to him from all sources. Here it may be pointed out that even the writings of Manu and his code are a Simriti and it may rightly be asked whether all this literature should be believed by the seeker (in Sikhism) without any critical reflection and assimilation. This would be plainly unacceptable even to the scholars quoted since many notions contained in this literature have not been accepted by the Gurus. If these commentators were to maintain that the terms referring to the various pieces of literature are mere symbols for the Sikh literature then it may be submitted that such a view, apart from subverting the great catholicity of the Gurus, also seeks to limit the scope of the knowledge as envisaged in Sikhism. Thirdly,
the mention of "Surat, mun and buddh" (awareness, mind and intellect) in the stanzas dealing with manna would be rendered meaningless if manna is taken merely to mean belief. Fourthly, the stress on vicharoo or vichar (thinking), in the "Mundavani" of Guru Arjan Dev, with which the Adi Granth ends, would not be accounted for, if we fall in line with these scholars who render manna as belief and agree that the only two stages of acquiring knowledge, as mentioned by Guru Nanak, were hearing and believing. This also would go against the general spirit of Sikhism. On the other hand, the argument in favour of rendering manna as reflection is fortified by the fact that hearing and reflection are traditionally considered in India as important aspects of gaining wisdom. If in Sikhism we interpret sannya and manna as hearing and reflection the interpretation would fit excellently in the background of the Indian view.

This interpretation of manna as reflection has been followed by at least one other scholar of Sikhism, Sohan Singh. He says likewise that, "as a matter of fact manne (or manna) is only one of the terms in the triune of Sravana, manna and mididhyasna which, since ancient times, has meant study, reflection and devotional attitude." He concludes that we should, therefore, interpret manna as reflection. Thus we see that the approach of Sikhism is not dogmatic.

It does not view wisdom in an authoritarian manner. Consequently Sikhism provides a person with an occasion to grow, through reflection on all the problems of the world, morality and the higher consciousness. This stress on the moral aspect may be compared with a somewhat similar development, in different perspective, in the West in its early stages. Wisdom in the early religious background of Christianity had also come to acquire an increased moral connotation. According to a scholar "there was already manifest a marked tendency to magnify the ethical and religious elements of 'wisdom' which later came to their full recognition." In the same context an identical view is expressed by another scholar who says that 'wisdom' in the early background of Christianity became "more and more practical and moral aim predominated." However, it may also be recognised here that the connotation and the approach of Christianity and Sikhism even differ from one another, in this regard.

It may also be appropriate to point out here that in Sikhism the virtue of wisdom synthesises both the knowledge of the world as well as the spiritual knowledge and thus attains a fusion of mysticism with realism in the context of sunnia, manmai and ek dhyan.

---


We may also allude to the great importance accorded in Sikhism to practice as a necessary constituent of wisdom. Guru Nanak says, "Rare in the world is the man of wisdom who reflecteth on wisdom and rare is the wise man in this world who practiseth this wisdom."\(^1\) Similarly, Kabir says in the Adi Granth, "If thou hast wisdom, destroy thy evil and discipline thy body."\(^2\) He then uses the analogy of the battle ground and remarks that a hero is one who actually displays his prowess and skill in the combat. This clearly establishes that wisdom in Sikhism is considered to be inextricably linked with practice. This view of wisdom has some similarity to the one held by Socrates, that, knowledge is virtue. However, it should be pointed out that, according to Socrates, a person who knew good would also choose good and hence the dictum 'knowledge is virtue'. This may be seen to embody a statement of psychological fact. It has, however, been often disputed whether a person who knows what is good would also choose good. It involves what has been termed as; 'Socratic fallacy'. The view here stated in respect of Sikhism is that a wise person ought to indicate his wisdom in his actions. The precept in Sikhism is normative and not positive, or semi-psychological, and in this it is seen to differ from the Socratic dictum cited above.

---

\(^1\) Adi Granth, Asa M.1 (6-3), p. 413 ("Jug giani virla Achari, Jug pundit virla Vichari").

\(^2\) Ibid., Kabir (34), p. 342.
It is interesting to add here that some philosophers have sought to treat wisdom as an all-inclusive virtue, and also immortal.

Finally, we may turn our attention to another requirement in connection with wisdom. The correct attitude of the seeker of wisdom ought to be that of open-mindedness and receptivity. This partly arises from how Hartmann takes wisdom as recognition of "one's own ethical non-being, failure and short coming." According to Guru Nanak also a man may acquire wisdom when he says to himself that he does not know and thus slays his ego. The Guru says that "knowledge or self-examination is possible only when one has slain the narrow ego within him." Guru Nanak further clarifies this point in another passage saying, "How can one instruct the one who sayeth that he knoweth? He who considers himself as having crossed the sea, how can one tell him?" This view, may again be seen to have some resemblance to the Socratic notion of wisdom. We may say that this open-mindedness alone

---

1 Cf. Lewis W. Spitz, The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists, (Cambridge: Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 32. "Virtue has always seemed to many men a major ingredient of wisdom; for Agricola it was the heart of the matter."

2 Ibid., p. 33, "For wisdom alone of all things is immortal."


5 Ibid., Ramkali M.1 (Siddha Goshti) (4), p. 938.
is the correct attitude of receptivity which is so very essential for a progressive view of wisdom.

4.4: Truthfulness

Veracity is another virtue which is accorded a very high value. Truthfulness, however, ought to be distinguished from 'Truth' in the metaphysical sense since the term 'Sach' is used in the Adi Granth both in the ethical sense of truthfulness as well as for the Absolute Dynamic - existent', or (Reality). Some scholars of Sikhism, who overlook the above dual usage, are invariably led to interpret the ethical virtue of truthfulness with the broader metaphysical meanings. Texts like "they who know the Truth, contemplate the True One and themselves become True,"1 and many similar ones, may cause the above confusion in case one is not careful about this distinction.

We may, however, add here that Truth in this metaphysical sense, when used for the Absolute, becomes the Supreme Ideal of the Sikh ethics as will be seen in the chapter under that title. It is, therefore, all the more necessary for us at this stage to bear in mind clearly the distinction between truthfulness, in terms of what Hartmann calls "agreement of one's word with one's thought, or conviction,"2


and 'Truth' which is the end of the whole moral endeavour.

It is in this sense of "agreement of one's word with one's thought, or conviction", to which we may also add, "the agreement of one's acts" that we are going to examine here the moral virtue of truthfulness.

We find Guru Nanak holding that "everything is below the Truth, but truthful conduct is above it." The stress on the conduct is a vital feature of Sikhism and this stress is visible, even in the case of truth.

Guru Ramdass declares, "We, the false and unfortunate ones, have one thing on the tongue and another in the mind. In appearance we stick to God while from within we are the most vicious of beings." This passage clearly brings out the two requisites of conformity of the thought with the word, and then, the agreement of the word with the act, as the essentials of veracity.

In the Zafarnama3 of Guru Gobind Singh the main weight of the argument and admonition administered by him, to Aurangzeb, the then emperor of India, rests on the desirability, in the first instance, of not making promises

1Adi Granth, Sri Rag M.1 (5-14), p. 62: See also Bhai Gurdas, Varas, Stanza 19, Var 18.
3Guru Gobind Singh, Zafarnama (Epistle of Victory). It was written to Aurangzeb, the then Mughal Emperor of India; the main theme and the moral being the desirability of veracity.
while knowing that these are not to be kept and, in the second instance, of keeping the word in case the promise has been made.¹ The Guru stresses that in such cases, the trust in the person making such promises² is lost and this harms the self of the person making the promise. The danger of 'promise breaking', if universalised, would also defeat the intention of the person making such a false promise as nobody would believe him. The Guru says, "If I would have also broken my pledge, I would not have left the fortress,"³ which would have thwarted the purpose of the opposing forces who had then not kept their word. The Guru emphasizes the moral desirability of keeping one's word, even if one may have to suffer for it, and he does so by quoting his own case. He approvingly refers to morality in Islam, which also enjoins truthfulness.⁴

The Guru then declares when a pledge is made in the name of the scripture (the Holy Quran in this case) and it is broken by the person who so made it the spiritual forces come to the aid of the aggrieved person.⁵ This indeed, appears to be a strong case for keeping one's word and shows

¹Ibid., Stanza 55.
²Ibid., Stanza 13, also 45.
³Ibid., 18.
⁴Ibid., 64.
⁵Ibid., 43, also 56.
also the sanctity which the spiritual forces attach to such a need of keeping the word. Pragmatically, too, this enables the person to keep one’s word even if one has to endure material sufferance.

Guru Arjan Dev also advises us to renounce falsehood, wrath and pride, clarifying further that "there is not any other evil so serious as falsehood" and "none derives any real gain from it." Thus falsehood is rejected on pragmatic grounds as well.

Bhai Gurdas contends that truthfulness helps a person to acquire peace and poise. He means that veracity, by promoting mutual trust and reliability, leads to the realization of equipoise and peace of mind. A prevaricator is always feeling insecure and restless as he is afraid lest he should be detected. This would disturb the unity of the Self and its equipoise. According to Bhai Gurdas falsehood is indicative of slavery. He says, in addition, that truthfulness generates truthfulness and falsehood infects other people and thus starts a vicious circle of falsehoods.

We may also observe another important aspect of this virtue. Guru Nanak declares that "a person speaks truth

---

1 Bhai Santokh Singh, Guru Nanak Prakash, Bash 3, Chapter 51.
2 Bhai Gurdas, Vars, Stanza 1, Var 30.
3 Ibid., Stanza 3, Var 30.
4 Ibid., Stanza 4, Var 30.
because love inspires him to it. This brings to our attention the fact that a person who loves others does not want to deceive them or lead them astray. The truthfulness thus is charged with a person's love for his fellow beings. As Hartmann points out, "a lie injures the deceived person in his life; it leads him astray. Sincere expression is good. One might accordingly think that the dispositional value of truthfulness is only a special instance of neighbourly love. A lie is, in fact, loveless." A lie, has an element of selfishness in it. It is an attempt to claim exception for one's self. In truthfulness, there is transcendence of this egoism.

4.5: Justice

Virtue of justice (maion or tapavas) is touched upon in various ways in Sikhism and is considered to be an important virtue in terms of its impact on the self as well as on social relationship.

At times the virtue of justice is referred to in terms of social equality. This is seen when Sikhism seeks to ensure equality by rejection of the caste system which had come to be regarded as a symbol of inequalities, whatever might have been the original idea behind this concept. The Gurus recognise that justice without social equality is

---

1Adi Granth, Prabhati M.1(7v5), pp. 1344-45.
2Nicolai Hartmann, op. cit., p. 282.
meaningless. It is virtue whereby man regards other men as his social equals in all respects—an important characteristic of social relationship. Consequently, this aspect of justice, namely equality, will be dealt with in detail in the chapter 6.

Secondly, the virtue of justice also consists in (1) respect for the rights of others and (2) non-exploitation of others. We may first discuss the respect for the rights of others as a characteristic of justice.

(1) The ethical requisite of respect for the rights of others is epitomised in the declaration of Guru Nanak that "to deprive others of their rights ought to be avoided as scrupulously as the Muslims avoid the pork and the Hindus consider beef as a taboo. Just as the two communities consider the above as most serious taboos on religious grounds, similarly, they ought to consider the transgression of the rights of others as a serious moral offence." He adds to it that "the Guru stands by thee if thou usurpest not one another's due." He further says, "none goeth to heaven by mere talk but emancipation is by living the truth."¹ So we may say that "sat", or truth, in social relations, in the sense of justice, is the characteristic of the person who does not violate the rights of others. A person must renounce the attitude that every one is for the promotion of his end.

¹Adi Granth, Var of Majh, Shaloka M.1 (2-7), p. 141.
To treat everyone's right as sacred is a necessary constituent of justice as averred by the Guru in the passage cited above. The virtue of justice as conceived by the Sikh Gurus has universal application even though they appear to address themselves to the Hindus and the Muslims directly as in the above passages.

In a similar spirit the compiler of *Premsumarag* lays down that "one ought to be just. One ought not usurp other's share. There is no worship like observance of justice."¹ We may note that the keenness of the compiler to stress the sanctity of this virtue leads him to place it even higher than worship. He perhaps considers the respect for the rights of others as the practical expression of all that one may realize in worship. This indicates the high regard in which this virtue of justice is held in Sikhism.

Even in the case of enemy property the said compiler requires the Sikhs to apply the same norm of 'inviolability'. He says that the same norm of justice ought to be applied even to the property of the enemy in war and the "Sikhs should not plunder the enemy."² Bhai Kahan Singh, in his commentary on this stanza, attempts to clarify the passage in question saying that it does not lay down the precept

that if there is anything belonging to the enemy army that also should not be taken possession of. Bhai Kahan Singh is of the opinion that the injunction under discussion only lays down that "the belongings of the public in the enemy sector" should not be plundered as it is unbecoming of a warrior to plunder the common public and cause them injury."\(^1\)

Whatever is the merit of this commentary and clarification, in itself, it may be the result of the peculiar conditions of the battles of those days when a distinction was made or was possible to be made between the property of the ruler and the ruled or that of the enemy force. While seeking to apply it to the present times we may say that the victor should not violate the lawfully acquired property rights of the people at large in the vanquished sector.

(2) We find also that the Gurus speak vehemently against exploitation of one by the other. The Mughals were the political rulers at the time of the emergence of Sikhism. Historically we know that while some individual Mughal rulers are world renowned for possessing the virtue of justice some, at times, showed relatively less respect for this virtue of justice in terms of non-exploitation of the Hindus, the Sikhs or even the Muslims. It is possible that a powerful man may come to accept the notion that every thing belongs to him and thus display a remarkable absence in him of the virtue of justice. Occasionally he may also twist the concept of

\(^1\)Ibid., Note 1 on para 851.
justice to assert that it entitles powerful men to have more or to be treated differently. It is in this sense that Thrasymachus, the Sophist lawyer, seeks to define justice in Plato’s Republic when he says, “Justice is the advantage of the stronger” or “Justice is the interest of the ruler and the stronger?” Socrates takes up the cudgel to show this definition to be unacceptable and dismisses it just as he had done the two other definitions of justice and which Brumbaugh calls “business ethics definition of justice” and “cow-boy ethics definition of justice.”

We may see that by declaring it to be a necessary virtue for both the Muslims and the Hindus, who were then the ruler and the ruled respectively, the Guru is seeking to show that it is wrong to hold on to the position taken by Thrasymachus. Thus the Sikh view of justice may have some affinity to the one held by Socrates when he says that “justice is the excellence of the soul and injustice the defect of the soul.”

At another place Guru Nanak calls this exploitation of the others as “devouring men.” The underlying idea is that

---

2 Ibid., p. 86.
some people like to impress others with their compassion for living things by calling themselves as vegetarians, but when it comes to the exploitation of other men, the same people would know no limits. This is called "devouring the whole man" in the night or the darkness. The point Guru Nanak establishes is that exploitation of men is no less than carnivorousness. A just man would not exploit others even if he has the means and opportunities for doing so.

Thirdly, justice is also understood in a legalistic sense in Sikhism. In this sense it represents an impartial disposition of the person who dispenses justice in deciding various legal cases. The usage of justice is indicated in the writings of Bhai Gurdas. He traces the state of justice during the various world-cycles (Yugas). He says that during the three world cycles preceding the present one, the virtue of justice was universally practised. This was indicated in the deciding of cases in an impartial manner. He then laments that in the present age justice is not administered in an impartial manner. At present only those can get a favourable decision who bribe for it ("Bhai tapava triha Yuga, Chautha Yug jo deev so Pave."

Similarly, in Premamarag, the one edited by Bhai Kahan Singh in Gurmatsudhakar, and the other published by Sikh History Society and edited by Giani Randhir Singh, justice is generally used in its legalistic sense and identified as

*Bhai Gurdas, Var, Stanza 7, Var 1.*
a virtue of the ruler or king. The compiler of this code says that in the dispensation of justice one should not give any undue favour to members of one's own religious or social group.¹

The version of Premsumarag, edited by Giani Randhir Singh, contains a similar stringent requirements of justice to be observed in the dispensation of justice by the administrator. He says that "before the Divine the ruler would not be questioned about his worship or obedience but the primary enquiry would be about the state of 'justice' in his domain. He would be asked as to who had to suffer the rigour of unjust pain. The ruler, therefore, ought to be vigilant to dispense justice carefully. He should always bear in mind and ensure that none suffers under him unjustly. If any powerful individual persecutes the weak, or causes them any injury, the ruler ought to haul the wrong doer and handle him over to the weak, so that, whatever wrong the former has done to the latter, the same may be done to the former."²

One may refer here to the duties of the guardians in Plato's Republic in respect to this dispensation of justice and note some similarity.

¹ Premsumarag ed., Kahan Singh, Gurmutsudhaker, para 866.
The same compiler further lays down that "the above cannon of justice ought to be applied in all cases irrespec­
tive of the parties involved in any dispute. The case may be against the administrator's own son, brother, mother, wife or ministers. But the administrator of justice ought not to give any weightage to the fact of his being a close relation of the accused. He ought to decide the case in an impartial manner."\(^1\) We may see that the compiler is seeking to use moral force to ensure the impartial dispensation of justice in a legalistic sense. In view of the fact that the administrator has the power to misuse his position the compi­ler is seeking to bind him down by a moral principle, namely, the virtue of justice. The compiler appears to have been influenced directly by the teachings of Guru Nanak in the Adi Granth where the Guru advocates the virtue of justice in its legalistic sense and makes it to be the principal charac­teristic of the ruler of the administrator.\(^2\)

The virtue of justice is also used in the sense of self-regulation by the administrator or the ruler. In this meaning of justice the compiler of Premsumarag prescribes that "the ruler also ought to subject himself to the same cannon of law and justice"\(^3\) as is applicable to others.

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 85.
\(^3\)"Premsumarag", ed., Bhai Kahan Singh, Gurmutsudhakar, para 857.
Bhai Kahan Singh in his commentary on this provision says, "This means the evils for which the ruler punishes the subject, should also be avoided by himself." This injunction may be understood in the sense of self-regulation on the part of the ruler or it may also be interpreted as an attempt to universalise the application of justice and the extermination of any exceptions in this regard.

A reference may be made to one more sense in which justice is understood is Plato's Republic. Socrates shows there that "in an individual, justice is a psychological balance." Since this balance is necessary for a truly human life justice turns out, as Socrates had thought, to have an intrinsic value for the individual. It is the psychological state necessary to lead human life fully and well.

In Sikhism this aspect of psychological balance is not treated as a virtue of justice. It is, however, sought to be covered in the treatment of temperance. Here attention may be called to the fact that what we have termed 'psychological balance' in the case of Plato is spoken of as sehag (equipoise) in Sikhism. Sehaj may come through the regulation of different passions like concupiscence, covetousness, ire, attachment, delusion or pride. It is dealt with in our examination of the need for regulating

1 Ibid., note 2 on para 857.
different passions or propensities. In the present dissertation, we have also referred to it as 'unity of the self'. So we may say while the importance of this psychological balance is recognised in Sikhism it is not referred to as 'justice'. Justice, as we have seen here, generally characterises a disposition indicated in social relationship.

In addition, justice entails a self-conquest or ego-transcendence in the sense that a person acting justly claims no exception for one's own self. This ego-transcendence is seen from all aspects of his conduct, namely, respect for the rights of others, non-exploitation of others and equality. It is a disposition which facilitates the conquest of ego (human) which was mentioned as an important aspect of self-realization in the chapter on moral standard (supra).

We may conclude with the observation that the virtue of justice is the most fundamental but the realized self goes beyond mere justice and is guided by universal love. We will see in the chapter on the social ethics that according to one explanation by the Guru, included in the chapter on social ethics, justice is the lowest form of altruism and the ideal self rises higher and realizes universal love.

4.6: Temperance

The virtue of temperance or self-control (sanjam) also finds a place in the scheme of the Sikh ethics. The virtue is regarded both as moderation and as regulation or direction
of the lower by the higher. Guru Amardas poses a question in regard to the nature of temperance. He asks, "What shall I seize upon and what shall I abandon, for I know not what to do?"¹ In the subsequent lines of the same passage, while referring to temperate persons, he says, "Truth is their temperance, this is the deed they do."² He then clarifies that mere fastings and ascetic practice are not temperance. He also reiterates that "truth and temperance (sahaj sanjam) are the only true deeds."³ Let us examine these two aspects of temperance, namely, as conduct of moderation and as regulation of the lower by the higher.

We find that in many passages Guru Nanak rejects an extremist code of self-control prevalent among some ascetics. This code required the seekers to exercise a kind of violent self-control of the various sense organs. Guru Nanak identifies this technique as "Hatha Yoga" which is rejected by him. Hatha Yoga is a discipline involving various bodily and mental controls, but central to them all is the regulation of the breath.⁴ "Etymologically, Hatha Yoga means 'Sun-moon'."⁵

¹Adi Granth, Sarang M.3 (3-3), p. 1234.
³Ibid., Bilawal M. 3 (7-1), p. 841.
We, however, see that "the traditional meaning of the word Hatha is (1) violence, force (2) oppression, rapine;" and "it is used adverbially in the sense of 'forcibly', 'violently', 'suddenly'," or "against one's will". It is in this sense that "this form of yoga is sometimes called 'forced yoga'." The techniques of this yoga are given in the texts Hatha Yoga Pradipka, Gheranda Samhita and Siva Samhita. The techniques include an elaborate system of various controls and purifications which is described as 'Hatha Yoga'.

This system of violent self-control is not accepted in Sikhism. Guru Nanak says, in this regard, "In vain I practised contemplation, austerities and self-discipline and in vain I controlled my sense-organs through Hatha Yoga, but the Ideal meeteth one spontaneously or in equipoise." But while an extremist code of asceticism as an ideal temperance is rejected in Sikhism moderation in different spheres of life is stressed. We may say that the approach in Sikhism to the problem of temperance, in the sense of moderation, is that of a layman. It is in this sense that eating less, sleeping less and talking less is stressed by Guru Nanak and others. This eating less or sleeping less is considered to be a disposition of moderation, choosing between the extremes of always eating and always sleeping.

1Theos Bernard, op. cit., p. 15.
on one hand and complete fasting and not sleeping on the other. Guru Nanak, in reply to the query of the Siddhas, says, "I sleep a little and eat a little. This is the quintessence I have found." In a similar tone Bhai Gurdas writes that "a Gursikh eats less, sleeps less and talks less." There is yet another instance in a sermon called "Sakhi Guru Amardas Ki". Here Guru Amardas extolls the virtue of temperance in the sense of moderation. He says, "A person ought to eat only when he is fully hungry, talk only when there is need for it, and sleep when he feels very sleepy." The Guru perhaps feared that this counsel for moderation might be misinterpreted as a counsel for asceticism and he, therefore, promptly adds to the above sermon that this is a virtue of moderation and should not be misunderstood as a counsel for asceticism or physical torture of the body.

We may, therefore, say while the technique of extreme and violent self-control is rejected in Sikhism temperance, in the sense of moderation, is regarded as a virtue. In this it is seen to have some affinity with a similar view of temperance held by Aristotle in Nicomachean Ethics. It is explained by Aristotle that "moderation in respect of

1 Adi Granth, Siddha Goshti M.1(8), p. 939.
2 Bhai Gurdas, Var, Stanza 2, Var 32.
certain pleasures and also (though to a less extent) certain pains is temperance—, while excess is profligacy. But defectiveness in the matter of these pleasures is hardly ever found, and so this sort of people also have as yet received no name; let us put them down as 'void of sensibility'. I Since in Sikhism also an attempt is made to reject profligacy as well as 'void of sensibility' as the proper dispositions, we can discern some affinity in this regard between the two views.

We may revert here to the idiom used very often by the Gurus in connection with temperance. It is called sat sanjam or each sanjam (truth temperance). It is possible that by using the idiom sat sanjam or each sanjam Gurus have tried to convey that temperance is a virtue in which sat regulates or predominates the other aspects of the individual. Here sat is understood to be used by the Gurus in almost the same sense in which it is used in the Sankhya school of Indian Philosophy. It may be added here that etymologically the word sattava is derived from the word sat. It may also be stated that in the Sankhya school, the modes, namely, sattava, rajas and tamas are regarded as three contending modes in a man. According to the Sankhya "the sattava element is what produces goodness and happiness. It is said to be buoyant or light. The rajas is the source of all activity and produces

pain. The tamas resists activity and produces the state of apathy and indifference. It leads to ignorance."¹ It is observed by S. Radhakrishnan that the doctrine of the gunas has great ethical significance. We are told that in devas (gods) the sattava element predominates while the rajas and the tamas are reduced.² Now, in Sikhism, we may say (without accepting the specific nature of these modes or the belief that all activity is a lower category) when the gurus use the idiom sat sanjam or each sanjam they could well be referring to this general principle of regulation or direction of the lower by the higher, namely sat. We do find the reference to the modes by the Gurus here and there in the Adi Granth, which is an evidence of their intimate knowledge of this tenet. So it is possible that the Gurus by the use of this idiom might have been referring to the general principle of temperance in somewhat the same sense in which Plato uses it in Book IV of the Republic, when he interprets temperance as being the 'master of one's self'. Plato explains there that "the human soul has a better principle, and has also a worse principle; and when the better has the worse under control, then a man is said to be master of himself; and this is a term of praise."³ In a similar manner the Gurus

²Ibid., p. 310.
might have sought to convey a more general principle of temperance by the use of the idiom of sat Sanjam or saith Sanjam.

Therefore, broadly speaking, we may say that temperance is a virtue which has both the negative and the positive aspects and in its being a direction of the lower by the higher it is both repressive as well as permissive.

The great need for this virtue to-day in the sense of moderation is stressed by Brumbaugh in view of, what he calls, "dangers of intemperance latent in our advanced technology." He opines that "men of this future world, think and consider that courage and justice may be crushed beneath an endless flow of commodities if you are intemperate in your use of the magic horn of plenty which the gods have given you." This ominous warning of the latent dangers of overflowing may sound rather exaggerated to persons of the scarcity areas. But whatever may be the merit of this prophetic conjecture, the virtue of temperance lays down the general principle, both in the sense of moderation as well as in the sense of direction of the lower by the higher. It is in this sense that temperance has an important role to play both in the personal lives as well as in the national or global relations of the entire human family.

---

Courage is a central virtue in the ethics of the Sikhs. It may easily be recognised that a man devoid of courage is a man without authenticity.

Courage, however, is a complex virtue. It embodies both fortitude as well as valour and although these two are grouped under one character they involve different response to the situation. Historically in Sikhism, just as in Christianity, fortitude appears earlier, but to be of any ethical significance it must have the potency for the second, namely, valour. However, before the transition or recourse to the second, a person has to ensure that a valour-response is the necessity of the situation. In the absence of such a moral regulation the person may respond rather violently to a situation under the influence of irascible passion and then rationalise it as an instance of courage, or he may mistakenly regard it as an act of courage. It is worthy of being remembered that courage tempered with poise is the proper moral response. But without the moral capacity of valour response the one professing fortitude in appearance may only be indicative of a recreant person. We propose to examine both of these aspects, that is, fortitude as well as valour.

Historically, in Sikhism, the accent on valour is somewhat more prominent after the martyrdom of the fifth Guru. It is a strange, and perhaps also meaningful,
coincidence because he comes almost in the midway of the ten Gurus. However, the two aspects fortitude and valour are not mutually exclusive and we find a comingling of the two in Sikhism from the beginning till the tenth and last human Guru. The terms used for the courageous and brave person in the Adi Granth are *sura*, *surbir*, *nidar*, and *nirbhau*.

In the oft-quoted couplet of the Adi Granth it is proclaimed by Kabir that "the battle drum is beat in the sky and lo, the target is pierced. The hero hath descended upon battle field. Now is the time to combat. The hero is he who fights for the faith, and though battered into bits, he abandoneth not the fight." In order to understand the sense in which Kabir uses the term "sura", we may examine the historical evidence. Kabir, a Muslim saint, under the influence of a devotional cult, set out on a blazing trail of a new faith, the one which proclaimed that there is only one God for all persons, Muslims, Hindus or others. And while he was welcomed by some, there were others who spurned

---

1 The Adi Granth is considered the 11th and last Guru.
5 Ibid., Bhairo M.3 (7-1-2), p. 1154.
6 Ibid., Shaloka Kabir(2-2), p. 1105.
him and regarded him as an outcast. Kabir, however, was not discouraged in his views. Now, in the passage cited above, he is exalting the virtue of suffering for the faith unflinchingly which is an example of what fortitude stands for in Sikhism. On the same page of the Adi Granth we again find Kabir rebuking those who desert the faith. To any such deserter he reminds that human life is not merely for filling the belly like a quadruped, but it is for facing the struggle.

Similarly, we find Guru Amar Das narrating the legend of Bhagat Prehalad and say, "They (his father, who had turned against Prehalad and other courtiers) locked up Prehalad in a cell, but the child was not afraid saying, 'within me is God'." The narration refers to rare fortitude displayed by Prehalad in facing, unflinchingly, persecution for what he believed to be true.

In the passages cited above, and some others as well, the concept of fortitude is reinforced by the belief that God is with the righteous and that divine courage is infused in the person displaying fortitude. We have the historical evidence of the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, facing persecution with a smile. A scholar of the Christian ethics calls it "infused supernatural fortitude" and advises "giving up

1Ibid., Maru Kabir (4-1), p. 1105.
2Ibid., Bahiro M.3 (7-1-2), p. 1154.
of one's life, rather than commit a moral evil, as St. Thomas More did in accepting martyrdom rather than consent to Henry VIII's acting as the head of the Church which Christ founded. It is this ability to suffer for one's word and belief that is referred to by Guru Arjan Dev, the martyr, when he refers to the Saints as "men of word (baohan), chivalrous are they." In Sikhism also this virtue is sometimes referred to as "infused spiritual courage." Guru Arjan Dev in this sense says, "God is fearless, He dwelleth with thee, why fearest thou then." Guru Nanak also, refers to the spiritually attuned person as one who "feareth naught, nor is he ever drowned."

God-inspired, confidence and courage is also indicated by Guru Arjan Dev when he remarks "God hath protected me ... and becoming fearless, I now enjoy the state of eternal bliss." In this manner we see that courage ought to be accompanied by composure, as the example of the Guru indicates.

In the writings of the most of the Gurus the Absolute is described as "fearless". The lead is given by Guru Nanak

Cf. also, Guru Gobind Singh, "Vachiternatak", Dasam Granth, Chapter 8, Stanza 24.
5 Ibid., Dhanasri M.5 (2-17), p. 675.
and other Gurus also follow him. It may, however, be possible that at times the Gurus are using “Mbhau” in respect of the Absolute to indicate its non-duality, since fear comes only when there is another which one may be afraid of. Thus when the Absolute is called Nirbhau it may mean that it is One and there is no duality. This apart, the Absolute is also called the destroyer of fear which being the sense in which it is being discussed here the Spiritual may be taken to infuse fortitude and valour. Guru Gobind Singh, in whom one notices the manifestation of both of the aspects of courage, also calls the Absolute, “fearless”, in the tradition of the earlier Gurus. He even calls it “all steal” which expression, however, is not used for the Absolute by the Gurus earlier to him.

We may now refer to the accent on valour, which culminated in the era of Guru Gobind Singh, though it is unmistakenly manifest in the Gurus who antedated him also. This culmination is sometimes described as a transition or what some scholars prefer to refer to as “call to arms”. The moral justification for the accent on valour is offered by Guru Gobind Singh in the composition entitled Zafarnama (Epistle of Victory), sent to Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperor. In it Guru Gobind Singh, after citing various circumstances

---

1Ibid., Maru M.1 (11-4-21), p. 1042; Cf. also, Ibid., Gujri M.6 (3-1), p. 507; Ibid., Rag Gujri, M. 3, p. 516; and Ibid., Maru M.4, p. 998.
of a particular combat, proclaims, "When the situation is past all remedies, it is righteousness to take sword." One may refer to a similar declaration made by Sri Krishna in The Bhagavadgita while exhorting Arjuna to take up the sword. It is an excellent example of Sri Krishna's views about the sense of duty.

According to Guru Gobind Singh the only consideration to be made before deciding to have a resort to such a recourse is to see that it is absolutely necessary and that all other avenues of rectifying the wrong have been tried out to their fullest extent. In the absence of such a control the direction might lead to dangerous consequences and, instead of qualifying a virtuous conduct, it may mistakenly provide a pretext for vengeance and violence which certainly would be immoral according to Guru Gobind Singh.

Historically, the accent on the need for displaying valour in a combat, was started by the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, and has continued ever since—the tenth Guru and various Rahitnamas in the post-Gobind Singh period. In between, however, we still find the instance of the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, accepting martyrdom without recourse to arms, thereby, manifesting fortitude which may be taken to testify to the non-exclusiveness of fortitude and valour.

The importance of courage as a moral virtue in Sikhism

---

1Guru Gobind Singh, Zafarnama, 22.
appears to have increased manifold during and after Guru Gobind Singh, as indicated in Habitsmas. It has played a significant role in determining whether a particular person accepts the Sikh ethics or not. Thus we find that in the code Ath Tankha Nama of Nand Lal it is said that the qualities of the Khalsa, among others, consist of "fighting in the fore-front, wearing of arms, or fighting resolutely."\(^1\) Another code of life rules by Bhai Chops Singh enjoins upon a Sikh "not to desert from the battlefield,"\(^2\) however fierce the struggle may be, and also to wear arms.

It may be interesting to observe that Bhai Sukha Singh, in his Gurubilas (Bikrami era 1854), composed in a period later than the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, shows the traces of development in terms of the accent on valour and has even cited a sermon of the fifth Guru. According to Gurubilas, the fifth Guru addressed Kalesi, the warrior,\(^3\) on the excellence of the virtue of fighting for righteousness. He is further reported to have extolled the role of an armed warrior who fights and never deserts. Such a person is able to conquer and rule the earth and, on death, attains salvation. In fact, this report of the sermon is marked by the spirit of post-Gobind Singh era. It is under the influence

\(^2\)Chops Singh, Ibid., p. 94.
\(^3\)Bhai Sukha Singh, "Gurubilas", Rash 3, Chap. 60, ed., Kahan Singh, Gurmutsudhakar, p. 554.
of this temper that the scene earlier to the sixth Guru is sought to be reconstructed by scholars and charged eminently with the spirit of combat and valour.

Regarding Guru Gobind Singh himself, he declares courage to be a virtue of the very high order. According to him, the brave and benevolent attain honour in the world.¹ John Clark Archer observes, "From the first, Guru Gobind Singh committed all the Sikhs to the exercise of arms, pledged them never to turn their backs upon the enemy in time of battle and never to surrender."² Heroic poetry became the vehicle of thought and spirit. Guru Gobind Singh proclaimed, "Sword, that smiteth in a flash, that scatters the armies of the wicked in the great battlefield, 0 thou symbol of the brave. Thine arm is irresistible, thy brightness shineth forth, the blaze of the splendour dazzling like the sun. Sword, thou art the protector of the saint, thou art the scourge of the wicked; 0 scatterer of the sinners, I take refuge in thee. Hail to the Creator, Saviour and Sustainer, Hail to thee—Sword supreme."³ It is during Guru Gobind Singh's period that the suffix, after the name

¹Guru Gobind Singh, Vachiternatak, Chap. 8, Verse 22.
of the members of the institutionalised brotherhood of the
Khalsa, was introduced as "Singh" (lion) for men and "Kaur"
for the women ("Kaur" is sometimes traced to 'lioness', but
it was used for the princesses among the Rajputs).

The wearing of sword was made one of the organisational
duties and the baptism itself was now to be prepared by
stirring the sacramental water with a double-edged dagger
(khanda). All this is indicative of the accentuated inter-
est and stress on valour but, so far as Guru Gobind Singh
is concerned, he has manifest in his character both fortii-
tude as well as valour, though the former is very often over-
looked by some people, thereby presenting a somewhat distor-
ted and unbalanced picture of Guru Gobind Singh and Sikhism.
The scholars very often also overlook the spiritual meta-
phorical meanings of sword as conveyed by Guru Gobind Singh.

We may, however, note also other important character-
istics of courage as manifest by Guru Gobind Singh. Firstly,
the noteworthy factor is that the militancy in courage was
not directed towards any religion or community and the
Hindus, Muslims as well as Sikhs fought together under his
command. Courage in the battle-field was devoid of any
hatred or enmity. Guru Gobind Singh has proclaimed, "Fear-
lessly I will declare the Spiritual truth, but without
enmity to any one." Secondly, this manifestation of valour

---

1Ibid., Chap. 8, Verse 31.
was accompanied by Guru Gobind Singh's propagation of such cardinal moral principles as equality, righteousness and universal brotherhood which he resolved to proclaim without fear of men. The Guru reiterated that he was human and a servant of God. He condemned those who might call him God. The humanistic content in this declaration is clearly visible. The stress on the necessity to re-awaken in oneself, authenticity and fearlessness, conjoined with the refusal to put up with evil and sloth for ever, is par excellence a humanistic approach.

Here may be the place to point out that with Guru Gobind Singh the tradition, initiated by Guru Nanak, fructified into a nation—a fully institutionalised nation. The virtue of courage, as cultivated by its members, was to promulgate as well as preserve this fruition of Sikhism. While writing about courage Nicolai Hartmann has also observed that "the most conspicuous form in which this value manifests itself is outward bravery, the ability to stake one's life, the spontaneous facing of extreme danger, the standing at one's post. In the early war-waging period of nation's life this is held to be synonymous with all virtue." We may clearly recognise that Sikhism has not been an

1Ibid., Verse 33.
2Ibid., Verse 32.
exception to it. But, courage as a virtue must, in the ultimate analysis, transcend beyond the frontiers of groups and nations, and must be indicated in a concern for the whole of mankind.

4.8: Humility

Humility is a virtue which has both personal as well as social importance. When viewed from the personal angle it consists of having a humble estimate of one's own merit and from the social one, it consists of checking the tendency to expect and demand approbation and subservience from others in recognition of the merit one possesses. It is a deliberate cultivation of refusal to go down to, what Henry Sidgwick calls, "dangerously seductive impulse"¹ of obtaining pleasure in one's own respect and admiration. The failure of man to cultivate humility in himself may be due to his ignorance of the moral ideal against which he must measure himself. Persons, who may even have some inkling of the ideal, would be humble as this brings home to them the fact of how far away they are from the realization of the ideal. The virtue of humility, thus, is not to be the virtue of only those who have some achievement to their credit, but it is to be the virtue of all who measure themselves against the goal of ideal-realization. It may be

reflected in the attitude of man towards himself, towards social relations, as well as towards the moral ideal which ought to be qualified by humility.

It is with all these aspects of the virtue that we find the Gurus occupying themselves. The terms used to denote humble and humility, in Sikhism, are "garibi",1 (poverty), "meetch"2 (low, in utterances of the Gurus like "I am the lowest of the low") and "nimana".3 The term "nimrata along with nitana"4 (humility and powerlessness respectively) are also used by Bhai Gurdas in the sense of 'humility'.

The Guru, providing the clue to humility, proclaims, "I am low and supportless, ignorant and shorn of merit."5 This attitude is required to be followed by others also for the cultivation of this virtue. The Guru, in another place, says, "Some pride on their power of speech, others that they have riches to lean upon, but I have no other support but God's; O Creator-Lord, save me, thy meek slave."6 Bhai Gurdas writes, "One who follows the instruction of the

1 Adi Granth, Majh M.5 (1-6-13), p. 98.
3 Ibid., Gauri Sukhmani M.5 (6-3), p. 266.
4 Bhai Gurdas, Wars, Stanza 2, Var 32.
Guru, calls himself as lowliest of the lowly. He then proceeds to explain analogically that one ought to have humble estimation of one's merit, as that attitude alone is expressive of one's merit. He quotes the examples of a guinea being lighter in weight, though more in value and merit, than the coins it can command in exchange, the diamond in turn being lighter than the guineas it can fetch. Another example of a mango tree laden with fruit and inclining downward, and many more, are cited in order to drive home the moral that humility is in fact a sign of merit and the value of this merit lies in not being proclaimed as a merit but rather in having a humble opinion about its possession.

From the social aspect, humility may mean virtue expressed towards fellow men, the Guru and the Absolute. The first seems to be the most difficult one because in the case of the Guru and the Absolute a person does sincerely know himself to be by far imperfect as compared to them, but in the case of his fellow men, in so many respects, may have views otherwise. But though the most difficult yet it is the most urgent because it is the foundational. It is the most disarming weapon, congenial attribute for social concord. The Guru declares, "Humility is my bludgeon, my double-edged

1Bhai Gurdas, Wars, Stanza 21, Var 23.  
2Ibid., Stanza 9, Var 26.
dagger is to be the dust for all men to tread upon. Yea, no evil doer can face these weapons. The Perfect Guru hath made me wise, this-wise.\textsuperscript{1} Here a historical fact may interest us. It was customary with the Sikhs, even before and after the times of Bhai Gurdas, that they greeted each other by touching each other's feet,\textsuperscript{2} a practice which was meant to reinforce the profession of humility. Bhai Gurdas cites this practice—head is high but it bows to feet\textsuperscript{3}—to bring home the moral of humility. Next comes humility before the Guru, the spiritual teacher, which indeed is only the proper attitude. The Guru says, "In utter humility, I fell at the door of the Perfect Guru. He honoureth the humble; and strokes their backs."\textsuperscript{4} The Guru himself gives expression to the virtue of humility, thereby, setting up an example unto others. Guru Arjan express many a time his own desire to apply "the dust of the saint's feet to the forehead, and becoming lowliest of the lowly."\textsuperscript{5} And then comes humility before the Absolute. The virtue of humility at this stage is not exclusive of the earlier two; it is rather here that we realize the reason for the earlier two

\begin{enumerate}
\item Adi Granth, Sorath M.5 (1-16-80), p. 628.
\item Bhai Gurdas, Vars, Stanza 3, Var 4; also, St.5, Vr.20.
\item Ibid., Stanza 18, Var 9.
\item Adi Granth, Sri Rag M.4 (2-4-68), p. 41.
\end{enumerate}
stages as well. No matter how much merit we might have considered ourselves to possess in relation to our fellow beings, it pales into insignificance before the Absolute Ideal, bringing home to us the futility of any other response than humility. We become aware of our imperfections and limitations. Guru Nanak declares that we speak, eat, walk, see and breathe within limitations and that our lifespan is limited too. The attitude or virtue of humility thus comes to be grounded in the awareness of the finitude of man and his merit which always falls short of an ideal excellence. While expressing his humility before God the Guru declares the "bride" (symbolic of self), to be humble and powerless.

The self here, by seeking to measure itself with the Absolute, becomes confirmed of the futility of nourishing any notion of pride.

In the treatment of this virtue by Bhai Gurdas we also come across quite a few classifications of things which, according to him, highlight the great importance of the virtue of humility. He cites the examples of "earth", "fire, and water" as huge things but possessing the virtue of humility because they do not "burst out" with their power.

\[1\text{Ibid.}, \text{Sri Bag M.1 (1 & 2-3), p. 15.}\]
\[2\text{Ibid.}, \text{Tukhari Chhant M.1 (7-1), p. 1107.}\]

Here the 'bride' is used for the devotee in the fashion of mystic Sufis.

\[3\text{Bhai Gurdas, Vars, Stanza 2, Var 4.}\]
\[4\text{Ibid.}, \text{Stanza 5, Var 4.}\]
Humility here may be taken to mean 'self-restraint' or acting according to one's function in the most orderly manner without any bursting out from a sense of one's importance or power. Humility does not require any slackening of one's function. On the contrary it expects performance of one's role, however important that role may be, without being engulfed by any sense of self-approbation. One ought to treat, even the very powerful roles in life, as the roles or functions one has to perform to the best of one's capabilities without being consumed by a sense of 'self-glow'.

He then names certain small things which he takes to be the examples of things professing humility. He points out that this humility is their virtue since otherwise those are things of great merit. In this group, we meet the examples of the small finger,\(^1\) the small drop of water,\(^2\) the poppy and the til seeds. He then proceeds to show the great merit of these humility professing things. The small finger is the ring-finger and is thus of great importance. The small drop of water is pearl-making. The small seeds have great usefulness and are, therefore, things of great merit and utility.

He argues that in spite of the great importance of these things they profess humility by remaining small in

\(^{1}\text{Ibid., Stanza 5, Var 4.}\)

\(^{2}\text{Ibid., Stanza 4, Var 4.}\)
appearance. Thus Bhai Gurdas shows that the virtue of humi-
dility is even possessed by big and small things of nature. 
Thus it is all the more necessary and important for man, 
who is also a link in this continuity of nature, as well 
as its apex, to possess humility. 

It is in this sense that he proclaims that "a Gurmukh
though powerful, professes powerlessness."¹ Humility is a
necessary part of the development of the "Gurmukh-hood"
the ideal self. It is in this sense also that the Guru
calls humility-possessing persons as nearer to the Ideal,²
or that they would be realizing the ideal soon,³ being on
the correct path.

In ascribing great importance to the virtue of humility
Sikhism may be seen to be in line with Christianity, and
the various schools of Indian philosophy.

4.9: Contentment

Contentment (santokh, from santosh, Sanskrit root
tush, happiness, calmness) is a virtue which plays an impor-
tant role in the ethics of the Sikhs. Sikhism has sought to
project a comprehensive approach to life, inclusive of
activity. This activism, in harmony with the spiritual

¹Ibid., Stanza 2, Var 32.
²Adi Granth, Sri Rag M.1 (4-3), p. 15.
³Ibid., Bilawal M.5 (3-7-12), p. 804.
ideal of human life, is central to Sikhism. But activism has some possibility of tiring the man and thus giving birth to occasional frustration in life. Virtue of contentment, therefore, is integral to this system.

It is possible that when a man has done all that he could the result of his activity may not be commensurate with his efforts. This is the critical moment when the boiling cauldron of human activity, faced with an anticlimax, may take recourse to two alternatives, in order to re-adjust itself to the situation. In Indian terminology, the alternatives may be called "vairagya" (renunciation) or "santokh" (calmness). The allure of ascetic vairagya or renunciation may be more tempting. It ensures, perhaps, better immediate adjustment. But the choice of the latter (santokh) is, ethically, more important and enduring because the person accepts the results with an equipoise, without losing the determination to act again, perhaps with better physical and mental equipment. Contentment (santokh) can thus be defined as a studiously cultivated state of mind, which acts as a safety value in human personality in contradistinction to the ascetic vairagya.

Importance of santokh in Sikhism in this sense is stressed by all the Gurus. The high place accorded to santokh may be judged from the fact that at times if a Guru mentions not more than three virtues santokh is one of them. The
expressions, such as "sat santokh vicharoo"¹ (truth, contentment, reflection) or "sat santokh sanjam"² (truth, contentment, temperance), bear testimony to the above inference. Similarly, the importance of this virtue may be seen from its frequent recurrence throughout the Adi Granth, conjoined with Sat, such as "Sat Santokh".³ In Janam sakhi, it is described as one of the four aspects of the spiritual progress, namely, society of good people, truthfulness, self-regulation and contentment ("Satsangat, Satya, Sam dam, Santokh").⁴ This again brings out its importance.

As to the nature of contentment it may be asked what should a person be content with. Should he be content with poverty, hunger and privations without making any effort at their removal? Does contentment mean accepting the status quo? Is it contentment with evil, lethargy or non-action? Does contentment mean accepting one's present situation without making any effort towards ethico-spiritual progress. Certainly all this is not santokh. Santokh does not mean fatalism, defeatism or compromise with evil. Rather, santokh is directly contrary to any compromise with evil. A man who refuses to surge forward and is not prepared for some of the frustrations, which may have to be encountered in the process,

¹Adi Granth, Mundavani M.5, p. 1489.
²Ibid., Ramkali M.1, Siddha Goshti (11), p. 939.
³Ibid., Maru M.1 (8-4-10), p. 1030.
cannot be called a man of contentment (santokh), because, he is afraid of putting his contentment to test. The acid test of genuine contentment lies in the acceptance of both success and failure with placidity. Contentment is indicative of the human resolve to act again since a failure does not disturb the equipoise cultivated by contentment.

The cause of absence of contentment in a man may be traced to the presence of fear in him. Refusal to subject contentment to the above acid test may, firstly, be due to fear in man that he would not succeed. This fear, and its adjunct complacency, are opposed to the virtue of contentment. In this connection Guru Ramdas says, “Make contentment thy father” (santokh pita kar).¹ Now what are the qualities associated with an ideal father? What else, if not the persuasive encouragement to surge ahead? A father is a symbol of the factor which removes fear. Thus santokh, according to the Guru, is there to provide the security of equipoise, both in the event of success and failure. Secondly, fear may also be caused by uncertainty of life hereafter. So Guru Arjan Dev says, “The world is content for the Guru has given the message of emancipation to all.”² Contentment, thus, is also indicative of emancipation from fear or misgivings about salvation. The Guru has given the message of

the possibility of emancipation for all. The man, therefore, need not entertain any fear of having to take some other births in different social groups for attaining salvation. Thus fear about it on this score is also removed. The contented person rises higher and continues making effort without fear. Contentment is a disposition born of the honest conviction that one is doing one's best in a spirit of humility. The virtue of contentment, therefore, accompanies this doing of one's utmost and leaving the rest to God. Bertrand Russell comes around almost to the same position when he says, "Christianity taught submission to the will of God, and even for those who cannot accept this phraseology, there should be something of the same kind pervading all their activities .... The attitude required is that of doing one's best while leaving the issue to fate."\(^1\) Accepting the religious phraseology regarding the outcome Sikhism says also, "and leave it to God."

Who are the persons described as contented? We have already said that they are free of fear or despair. They are men of hope as they have trust in the message of peace given by the Guru. Now, Guru Amardas further clarifies that only a pure person, free from guile and viciousness, can be called the "embodiment of truth and contentment."\(^2\)


Is there any doubt then that a person willing to put up resignedly with ignorance, dirt, privations, fear and the status quo cannot be called a man of contentment and purity? But a person who contemplates the ideal, seeks and obtains the guidance of the teacher (Guru) and engages himself in ceaseless activity with the disposition that he would accept all that he has to confront on the way and still continue the progress in a spirit of hope, will be called a contented person.¹

In India distinction has generally been drawn between 'vairagya' and 'santokh'. The former may involve the renunciation of a situation but the latter indicates a sticking on to the effort at surging forward in the promotion of human welfare. One shall be unmindful of failures because one has trust in the justness of God, which is tempered with grace. Contentment is the dispositional shock-absorber, whatever be the nature of those shocks. It assists a person in rising above the psychological fret and fury involved in an activity without renouncing the activity. This activity, we presume, shall be a moral activity since a man free of viciousness and guile can only be called contented.

There is, however, the danger of contentment being misunderstood by some. At times contentment is interpreted in a 'backward-looking' manner. It is sought to be understood

¹Ibid., Basant M.5(2-2), p. 1192.
as something which emerges when a person compares himself with those who lack something which he possesses. For example, let us take a person who has half a rupee but is in need of one rupee. The plain course for him would be that he should work for it. Now, if instead of working for it, he consoles himself by saying that there is someone who does not even have half a rupee or that poverty is a virtue and that his working for his needs or for the needs of others would go contrary to his 'spirituality', would we, or should we, call such a person as one having cultivated contentment? The answer may be that such a person could be called content only through a distorted notion of contentment. Plainly speaking this attitude may, in the first instance, most accurately be called smug complacency. In the sense that this person says, "I have something" in comparison with a fellow being who does not have it." Secondly, this may smack of egoity or pride, in which one hunts up for some inferior fellow being from whom one (this so-called content person) is better off. In view of the fact that pride or egoity is declared to be a great evil in Sikhism and that great stress is laid on the virtue of humility this backward-looking sort of odious comparison of myself having and some unfortunate not having is downright immoral and can be called a virtue only by someone who has the ethical scale turned topsy turvey. In view of the unequivocal views of Sikhism about pride or self-glow, we may regard such a view...
When a scholar ventures to interpret contentment in Sikhism in terms of these backward-looking, odious comparisons, we can point out to him the above implications of such a view. We may, therefore, not be in a position to agree with a writer who, while discoursing on contentment in Sikhism, says, "When one feels that one has not enough, one must compare oneself to another who has nothing. A one-eyed man must thank himself that he is not blind." The same writer then quotes Welton approvingly when the latter says that "adversity is no punishment because in poverty there are few temptations and one turns to God." Clearly we may say that a person who indulges in such comparisons suffers from pride (ahankar) rather than that he has cultivated the virtue of contentment. We have already pointed out that such a view goes against the spirit of Sikhism.

We may also refer to a somewhat similar approach, in a different context, of another scholar, L.R. Puri, who feels that he is seeking to expound the general doctrine of the Sikh Gurus. He tries to create an impression that compromise with poverty and the status quo is for the "spiritual uplift". He states, "Perhaps it is really good to help the needy, to clothe the naked, and feed the hungry; but are we sure that

by doing so we are doing good and not harm ... It may result in the spiritual degradation of the poor creature; for we know not whether privations and sufferings are better for his spiritual uplift or plenty.\(^1\) (Emphasis added.) The fact that he says "'perhaps' it is really good," and then goes on to suggest that it may not be good, shows how grossly he has misunderstood the Sikh ethics which has laid unequivocal stress on altruism as we may see in Chapter 6 (Infra). Secondly, it may be submitted that the conjecture of the scholar that privations may promote spiritual uplift can only be called an evil compromise with the status quo. It is an un-Sikh interpretation again because Sikhism is grounded in the "Forward-looking Optimism" ("Chardi Kala") and "Victory for sword (righteousness) and affluence" (Degh Tegh Fateh") as the fundamental tenets along with spiritual effort.

Celestin N. Bittle, a scholar of Christianity, calls such an attitude of non action as 'sloth' which he regards as one of the seven capital sins.\(^2\) In case contentment is a virtue in the sense in which the scholars have interpreted it as "comparison with those who do not have even that," or, in a different context, as a compromise holding that poverty

---


may be conducive for the spiritual uplift, then we may have no ground for dissension with those who argue that backwardness of a country or its people is directly traceable to such a morbid view of contentment. But our main argument here is that contentment is not understood in this sense in Sikhism. The virtue of contentment has to be interpreted in the spirit of 'forward looking'. It may be a virtue indicated after the activity and not a substitute for activity. Now as activity is a continuous affair the virtue of contentment is also a permanent disposition and has a great moral and psychological value.

At times contentment is subjected to criticism. J.S. Mill, for example, observes that "fools, rascals and beasts are probably more contented than intelligent men relatively to their expectation but they are less happy absolutely, because they miss delights which are above their perception."

In a reply to it we may agree with another scholar who points out that Mill uses satisfied as equivalent to contented, whereas we are using it as inclusive of happiness¹ and equipoise, which is born of the awareness that one has done his best. The difficulty of the above position lies, therefore, in the fact we are isolating contentment as a virtue from the total moral scheme and then seeking to condemn it in the sense of satisfaction. But we should consider it as

a part of the moral scheme of life. In that case these categories of persons mentioned by Mill and many others of the similar nature, may not be called beings who have cultivated the virtue of contentment.

Similarly, contentment is often mistakenly understood in the sense of personal or social soporification. Joad, while commenting on the vote, by the English Parliament in 1818, of a million of public money for the construction of Churches to preach submission when many Englishmen were facing financial difficulties, has said, "God, it seems is cheaper than a living wage, and no less effective as a means of securing social contentment." Whatever may be the other merit of this criticism, it may be pointed out that social contentment in the sense of social lethargy is what has been understood by the scholar in the manner of the 'backward looking' of a man of despair. We may submit that we have not interpreted the moral virtue of contentment in the sense of 'social soporification', born of inactivity or despair. Contentment, as understood by us here, is in the sense of forward looking and is an accompanying disposition to ceaseless activity for ethico-spiritual progress. It is what a person of optimism and hope ("Chardi Kala") cultivates.

\[^1\] C.E.M. Joad, The Future of Morals (London: John West House, 1940), p. 11.
Is there any necessity for this virtue today? The answer may be an emphatic 'yes'. When the whole of humanity is seeking to work to the utmost to provide mankind with better and more congenial conditions of ethico-spiritual standard every person ought to cultivate contentment and avoid despair and slackening of effort in the face of personal failure or any smug complacency born of personal success. Contentment thus indicates transcendence of ego or narrow self. It is a sign of trust in God and grace. Contentment takes away the tiring frustrations of existential life without slackening the pace of progress. The gospel of contentment is, therefore, of permanent value. It is not that necessity for it was felt more during the earlier times. It is equally, if not more, needed in the modern technological era of rising human accomplishments. But it must be understood in the sense of a 'forward-looking' virtue. This is "santokh" in contradistinction to "vairagya" in the sense of renunciation.

4.9: Concluding remarks

We have presented the various aspects of the virtues of temperance, wisdom, truthfulness, justice, courage, humility and contentment. It may be asked whether any hierarchy of these virtues has been attempted in Sikhism. The answer is in the negative. One does find isolated references to certain virtues or certain groups of virtues but any systematic
gradation is not attempted. The absence of such an attempt could have been inspired by the feeling that such gradation is not necessary. It could also be due to the general methodology used in Sikh literature where no special or detailed examination is undertaken in respect to virtues. Virtues thus are treated in a general way and, in spite of the great importance attached to them, no ascending or descending hierarchies are attempted. We may, therefore, conclude that all these virtues are cardinal and define, in general, the behaviour of the moral agent as it ought to be.

We may refer here to the treatment of virtues as found in Hindu Schools of Philosophy. We find these virtues included in the sadharana dharma¹ list. The sadharana dharma is the list of generic duties which is to be followed by the members of all "Varnas" (castes). We may, however, mention that in Hinduism "courage and justice" are regarded to be the "Visesha Dharma", that is they are the exclusive duties of certain caste, namely, "Kshatrya" (the warrior caste). The recourse to the arms was the duty of this caste. But in Sikhism all the virtues, including courage and justice, are moral characteristics to be cultivated by all. This is due to the rejection by Sikhism of the Hindu caste system along with the division of the virtues in terms of castes.

We have not taken up the 'love of fellow men' which is to be expressed in terms of 'altruism' in the present chapter and we shall take it up in Chapter 6 infra.

However, before passing on to the next chapter we may add here that while men are advised to cultivate virtues for realizing Sacrara-hood they are cautioned against the danger of becoming proud of their virtues. The attitude of a person on this ethico-spiritual path ought to be one in which the person's ego is not permitted to 'puff itself up' or glow with the idea that it possesses these virtues while others do not have them. One may cultivate all the virtues but, like the Guru, should claim, "I am virtueless."1

---

1Adi Granth, Vadhans M. 5 (4-1), p. 577.