Chapter 6
SOCIAL ETHICS OF THE SIKHS

6.1: Prolegomena

Every person, at birth, finds himself in a social group. His growth and development is also a social phenomenon. In so far as the practice as a whole is concerned we may agree that the personal and social morality cannot be separated because even in the case of such responses as are directly concerned with one's self there is an element of social involvement in some indirect manner. But it may be submitted that in a theoretical study of ethics distinction between social and personal morality would be very helpful from the viewpoint of clarity as well as to appreciate the special stress laid in any system on the various aspects of the social response of the individual. In this analysis by social ethics we mean the study of the response of the man in social situation according to certain moral principles.

It may be added here that the social situation is a test in terms of which it may be possible for us to evaluate whether a person who professes humanistic outlook is faithful to what he proclaims or is merely a sentimentalist who
is dabbling in emotions but is devoid of action in the moral sense.

While a mystic intuition is subjective and not open to demonstration to others, we can know it in the conduct of the mystic, more particularly his social actions. It is in this sense that Albert Terrill Rasmussen, a scholar of Christianity, says, "If there is no difference in the motives and direction of the behaviour of those who are touched by the grace of God as compared with those who walk alone, then the light is indeed the light that fails."¹

India being the birthplace of Sikhism a brief reference to the background in terms of social ethics would help us to appreciate better the standpoint taken in Sikhism in regard to social ethics.

If we look to the early Vedic literature we may agree with Professor N.A. Toothi that "the highest individual development was required to be achieved in and through society, or to use the more comprehensive Hindu term, through 'samsara'."² However, when we look to the later period, we find, as pointed out by another scholar of the Hindu ethics, Surma Dasgupta, that "The Upanisads have recognised the concept of social good, but have given it a

subordinate position. Thus it is described that persons, who have accomplished works for public good, will depart at death by the smoky path and pass on from smoke to night and through a long course reach the devas (gods), but again return by the same route and change into smoke and then into mist, rain, seeds and again pass into the offspring of those who eat them.¹ This, according to the above scholar, points to the subordinate position accorded to the concept of social good.

Further it may be said if all are the manifestation of One spiritual continuum they ought to be treated as equal. Acceptance of the principle/equality of men may thus serve as an acid test of the systems which view the ideal in the perspective of the spiritual continuity and also evolve the ethico-spiritual precepts from the nature of reality. A pertinent and critical question may be asked whether Sikhism meets the requirements of the above test.

In Sikhism the socio-economic universe is declared to be the proper moral universe and consequently we would be interested to discover the nature of social relationships held by it as desirable. We had occasion to remark earlier that the ethical endeavour at its highest represents the transcendence of narrow egoism and we may now seek to find

¹Surma Dasgupta, Development of Moral Philosophy in India (Bombay: Orient Longman's, 1961), p. 12. The Chaandogya Upanisad quoted is V, 10-3-6.
out whether the social good occupies a permanent place in this scheme of values or Sikhism also contributes to the view that even the social good has to be abandoned for some life of seclusion in which the whole attention is directed to one's Self in contradistinction to any involvement in the social good.

6.2: The fundamental principles of social ethics in Sikhism

The fundamental principles of the social ethics of the Sikhs are four, namely, social equality, universal brotherhood, seeking good of all (altruism) and social service. All of these principles are inter-related and taken together they are the foot-holds of Sikh ethics in terms of social relations. We have called them fundamental but the last two, namely, altruism and social service are, in fact, practical measures to realize the third, the universal brotherhood. We may, therefore, divide our study in the present chapter under the two heads, social equality and universal brotherhood.

Here may be the place to add that the tenet of social equality in Sikhism has not arisen from any ratio cination but from the spiritual unity of mankind and it asserts not only that men are equal but that this equality ought to be realized in conduct, also. This leads us directly to the principle of universal brotherhood, which in turn, directs us to the need for seeking the good of all since this is a
practical way of realizing the unity of mankind. However, the good of all is not an affair of mental or intellectual assent and attitude only but ought to be actualized by service to others.

6.3: Social equality

The doctrine of social equality as proclaimed in Sikhism is partially related to the historical conditions prevalent in India at the time of its emergence. The problem of social equality has been examined in this context from four aspects: (1) view of caste equality; (2) relations among economic classes; (3) relations among men of different religions and nationalities; and (4) status of women in society.

Frequent referenced occur in the Sikh literature exposing the existence of inequalities sustained and perpetuated in India on religious grounds. The caste system is an outstanding example of it which is rejected in Sikhism. It may, therefore, be necessary to examine this institution in some detail as many of the arguments employed against it could be held valid also against other attempts at supporting any similar system of inequalities.

6.4: Caste system—general

According to an eminent Indian scholar, R.N. Dandekar,
"The caste system of India represent the ethical organisation of the social life of the Hindus, just as the four stages of life are the ethical organisation of the personal life of the individual."¹ Inequality based on birth is associated with this system.

The caste system was attacked and denounced by Buddhism but it has survived this repudiation. The outright rejection of this system by the Sikhs and the protracted struggle by them as well as by the humanistic devotional schools of Hinduism and growing humanistic consciousness among the Indians in general has finally fructified in this that the Constitution of the Indian Republic contains injunctions against discrimination on the basis of caste. But whether the system has been rejected in India completely in practice also is very much an open question.

One of the major points of departure with the Sikhs from Hinduism, right from Guru Nanak, the first Guru to the last has been the rejection by the former of the caste system of the Hindus and the "ethical organisation of the social life" based on it.

Originally "varna" is said to have stood for the social division on functional basis and "jati" for the castes. But whatever might have been the original connotation, by the

time Sikhism appeared in India, the term varna and jat or jati were used interchangeably as synonyms to denote the social division indicated now by the term caste. The Sikh Gurus also use them as synonyms as seen in the utterance of Guru Gobind Singh, "Chakkar chahan aur bharan jat aur pat nahin jeha."¹

Though initially castes were mainly four,² namely, brahmin, kshtrya, vaisha and sudra, by the time of the Sikhs Guru these had undergone enormous sub-divisions.³

**Origin of caste system**

Caste system is, generally speaking, traced to these sources: Occupational or functional division as classes; social division in terms of some graduated origin from a Divine entity; the law of karma, according to which one enjoys the fruit of his actions in the past life; and cyclical development of successive yugas (ages).

**Caste division based on occupational or functional classes**

The view has been held both by the eastern and the

¹Guru Gobind Singh, Japu, 1.

²According to R.N. Dandekar there was a fifth group whom he calls out-castes who were lower than even the sudras (op. cit., p. 143).

³Bhai Gurdas, Varq, stanzas 8-13, War 8, Cf. also, R.N. Dandekar, op. cit., pp. 143-144. "Although this general pattern of the four major castes continues today there are actually more than three thousand castes in India forming a complex variety of real castes, sub-castes, mixed castes, left-hand castes and exterior castes which form the society of the sub-castes."
western scholars that the "varna" division is more a division in terms of economic classes. While referring to the extensive research of the Vedas by a scholar, named Ludwig, it is said by Emile Senart that the search by Ludwig has led to the recognition that in the Vedas he has discovered only two classes, the one of priests and the other of nobles who are placed above the mass of the Aryan people, the Visas.\(^1\)

Another scholar, L.F. Ward, also seems to follow in the footsteps of Nesfield and Ibbeston in interpreting castes as classes. L.F. Ward says "The four so-called Estates of European History, so clearly recognised in the eighteenth century, correspond so well to the four great castes of India."\(^2\) The four estates consisting of the clergy, the warrior or ruling class, the nobility, the merchants and business class, the commons of England ... the labourers and artisans class are compared by Ward to the corresponding four varnas, namely, brahmin, kshatriya, vaisha and sudra, respectively.

An Indian scholar, P.H. Valvalkar is also of the opinion that the varna division is based on the various

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functions and therefore a question of the superiority of any one varna over the others does not arise.1

However, it is maintained by R.N. Dandekar, "Division of society into classes is a common feature all over the world but the caste system in India is peculiar in many respects and not comparable with analogous institutions existing elsewhere."2 (Emphasis added.) Thus we may say that Ward seems to have overlooked these peculiarities.

Origin of caste from divine entity

There is a passage in the Rig Veda, namely, the "Parush Sut"3 in which men of the different castes have been described to have emanated from the different parts of the body of Demiurge, the Primordial Man. The brahmin is described to have come out of the mouth; the kshatriya from the arms; the vaisha from the thighs (or the stomach area); and the sudras from the feet of the Demiurge. This passage is frequently cited to establish that the caste system traced its origin from the divine entity and is therefore, sanctified. Here it is often overlooked that

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2R.N. Dandekar, op. cit., p. 146.

Cf., also, Emile Senart, op. cit., pp. 133-134. "The caste system has its origin in a normal evolution of the ancient constitution of the family—an organic evolution, but one peculiar to India ... " (Emphasis added.)

3Rig Veda, X.
the description is merely symbolic. It is, however, used by some as a pretext to assert the sanctity of the caste system.

This may raise a question whether the scheme of caste system as found in the laws of Manu was known and practised even during the early Vedic period such as the Rig Vedic. Max Muller appears to deny this possibility. Emile Senart also maintains a similar view, though he also points out that "the texts will, perhaps, never furnish a decisive answer." 

**Caste membership due to karma (actions) in the past life.**

It appears that at times the institution of caste was also sought to be supported by the notion that the birth of a person in a particular caste was due to his action in the past life. A person was therefore required to wait for birth in the next life in a higher caste which would enable him to attain salvation.

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1Max Muller, *India—What It Can Teach Us* (London: Longman Green & Co., 1883), p. 93. Foot note. "... during times of conquest and migration, such as represented to us in the hymns of Rig-Veda, the system of caste as it is described in the Laws of Manu, would have been simple impossibility."


Origin of castes as cyclical development of successive yugas (ages) of the world

There is also the view of the caste system as having developed in terms of cycles (yugas) of the world. This notion is brought out by Bhai Gurdas who might have taken it from the then prevalent Indian notion about it.\textsuperscript{1} While explaining the world and the existence according to this view Bhai Gurdas writes that four yugas (ages) were established and these were placed under four varnas.

We find a similar reference in Muir's Sanskrit Texts, 1, p. 149 and 86 seq. This view is, however, rejected by Emile Senart.\textsuperscript{2}

Birth or voluntary selection of profession as the basis of the caste

In recent times I had the occasion to discuss the question of the origin of the caste with Swami Samarpananda, ex-chancellor the Gurukal Kangri (University). He reiterates that the varna was originally based on a system of voluntary selection of professions by people and the caste was determined by the profession one chose. This contention is supported by him from the fact that varna is derived

\textsuperscript{1} Bhai Gurdas, Vars, stanza 5, Var 1.

\textsuperscript{2} Emile Senart, op. cit., p. 137. "The trains of reasoning which connect their appearance either with successive ages of the world or with the natural inclination of mankind have neither more authority nor more stability than an adventitious fiction which reserves for each caste its own particular heaven."
from the Sanskrit root "Vrt" (meaning—to select). According to him, around the Mahabharata period, the caste came to be decided on the basis of birth.

In the Laws of Manu, however, we find that the passage in the Rig Veda, to which we had occasion to refer earlier, is pressed into service. And here, as pointed out by Emile Senart, "It is obviously an adjunct which disturbs the order of the cosmic theory." And it is an adjunct which is capable of being misunderstood and misused against the lower castes.

We may refer to the fifth group, identified by R.N. Dandekar as out-caste, which appears to have been condemned to suffer all legal, social and religious disabilities which a low caste Hindu is normally subjected to and at the same time the out-caste were denied the few advantages which would have accrued to them had they belonged to the regular caste system.

We may, therefore, conclude that even if the caste system at the time of its emergence was not based on the accident of birth, it came to be so determined later, much earlier to the emergence of Sikhism.

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2 Emile Senart, op. cit., p. 136.
3 R.N. Dandekar, op. cit., p. 145.
6.4: Reaction against the caste system among the Hindus

We now come to the later period during which Kumarila attempted to reconstruct the edifice of the caste system.

S. Radhakrishnan says, "Kumarila, the Brahmin architect who tried to build a stable society out of the chaotic conditions left by the distintegration of Buddhism, sought to strengthen the Brahminical cult by laying the foundations of caste solid and strong in a system wherein only the three upper classes were allowed to perform sacrifices, people at large were left to their own devotional cults."¹

When we come to the great Hindu idealistic traditions of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara and Visistadvaita Vedanta of Ramanuja, the caste system is still accorded some recognition. Their teachings logically imply complete equality and universalism but, out of deference to traditions, they accept the validity of this institution. Radhakrishna says of this, "The traditional theory that birth in a particular caste is not a matter of chance, but is the necessary consequence of conduct in a former existence, inclines Sankara to accept the claim of the upper classes, gods and rishis, for the exclusive right to study the Veda."²

Similarly, Ramanuja also accepted the inequality in worship and other things as enjoined by the caste system.

²S. Radhakrishnan, op. cit., p. 616.
Radhakrishnan points out that even Ramanuja, whose religious teachings implied social equality, "out of deference to tradition he concedes that freedom is open only to the three upper classes, and others will have to work their way up and wait for the next birth. We cannot, therefore, say that he was in full sympathy with the logical implications of his teachings."

But in spite of the fact that Sankara and Ramanuja, the two absolutist philosophers (the unqualified non-dualist and the qualified non-dualist, respectively) themselves did not fully accept the logical conclusions of their own teachings, their service cannot be underestimated in at least suggesting the way to the final rejection of the caste institution by the later systems. The universalism implied in the standpoints of these traditions serves as the major argument with the later systems against the efficacy of the caste inequalities.

The devotional schools of Hinduism gradually began to question the validity of these inequalities. According to Radhakamal Mukerjee, "One of Ramananda's oft quoted teachings is, "Let no one ask a man's caste or with whom he eats. If a man shows love to Hari (God), he is Hari's own". Men and women of every caste and creed could gain

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1Ibid., p. 661.
admittance to this ascetic order, and could share their meals as well as pray together.¹

Thus it may be said that the protest against the inequalities both in terms of worship as well as social relationship is quite visible within the fold of the later Hinduism. In this one may notice a sort of reawakening of the earliest Vedic spirit of universalism.

6.6: Rejection of caste inequalities in Sikhism

The ethical organisation of the Hindus, in terms of the varnas or castes, which is described as the "objective morality of the Hindus"² is completely rejected in Sikhism. Complete equality among all men is declared by the Sikh Gurus to be the fundamental moral principle required to regulate the social relations and communication.

Promulgation of equality and the categorical rejection of the caste system and other symbols of inequality are attempted systematically and comprehensively in Sikhism. The following arguments, though simple in nature yet appealing as straightforward, are very often employed: (1) validity of the caste inequalities is denied as there is no fundamental difference among men in terms of physical constitution; (2) laws of nature are not more kindly oriented towards the

members of the so-called upper castes; (3) men have not emanated from different parts of the primeval man; (4) attainment of the ideal is possible for all men irrespective of caste distinctions right in the present life itself. Thus men need not wait for birth into the next higher caste for the attainment of salvation or spiritual realization. Distinctions of caste and inequalities, consequently, are rendered meaningless, and (5) birth of a person and consequently the caste based upon it, does not enter into the ultimate reckoning of his deeds.

We also come across various supplementary arguments in this regard which deny the validity of the caste system. The arguments employed, as seen above, are empirical, intuitional as well as ethico-spiritual so as to reject all possible grounds for support to this system.

In a polemic with the sacerdotal caste of Brahmins Bhagat Kabir enquires, "How art thou a Brahmin and I a lower caste? Is it that I have blood in my veins and thou hast milk?"—thus exposing the absurdity of any contention or a claim by the higher caste men that there are physical differences among men of the different castes. Similarly, in another passage in the Adi Granth, it is asked, if Brahmins were different from others why they did not appear in the world by means other than the human birth.

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1Adi Granth, Gauri Kabir Ji, (4-7), P. 324.
The second point against the caste system on empirical grounds is scored by Guru Nanak when he points out that laws of nature do not react differently in respect to the higher caste men. Since nature makes no discrimination in favour of the twice born, by recognising their superiority in any manner, the myth of caste superiority is clearly seen to be man-made. Guru Nanak contends, "What merit is in caste?" and he himself answers, "This is the real truth that he who tastes the poison will die." This empirical evidence is also adduced by Guru Amardas when he advises against the caste system. He points out, "Everyone sayeth, there are four castes, but it is from God that everyone cometh. The same is the clay which fashions the whole world; Yea, the same clay the potter moulds into vessels of all kinds. The five elements make up the body's form, and who can say who hath less of these or more?" 

So it is that the Gurus denied the validity of the caste on the basis of any supposed difference in the fundamental physical constitution of men of the different castes. The prejudice had, therefore, no grounding on objective fact.

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1The three upper castes are termed as twice-born as the sacred initiation ceremony is held to be their second birth. The fourth caste is not permitted the sacred initiation and therefore they are not considered to have been born second time in the present life.


3Ibid., Rag Bhairo M.3, Chaupadas (1 to 4-1), p. 1128.
The claim that the different caste men had emanated from the different parts of the Primeval Man is also repudiated in Sikhism. We have already noticed the analogical argument of potter and clay and there being 'neither more nor less of it' in every one. It is further added in respect of God that "His caste is castlessness." He is incarnated not, is self-existent ... all hearts are illumined by the Light of Lord. Sikhism also denies that caste is prevalent from the beginning. In the primordial state "no man of caste or birth, high or low could be seen ... there was no distinction of colour or coat or of the brahmin and the kshatriyas." Guru Nanak declares, "You ought to see the light within all, and not look up for caste as the caste is of no consequence." And he declares on the basis of his intuitive insight that "in the yond also, there is no caste nor the power wielded by them." Again, "The God mindeth not our caste or birth." The superstition that different parts of the Demiurge gave rise to different castes is, therefore, invalid and untrue. In fact, "vain is the pride of caste, vain the pride of glory." The Lord giveth shade

1Ibid., Sorath M.1, (1 & 2-6), p. 597.  
2Ibid., Maru M.1 (6-3-15), p. 1035.  
3Ibid., Asa M.1 (2-3), p. 349.  
4Ibid., Var Asa with Shaloka M.1 (3-11), p. 469.  
5Ibid., Prabhiti M.1 (4-10), p. 1330.
Sikhism, thus, consistent with its universalism, refuses to accredit the caste institution in social ethics and its seers, on the basis of their direct intuitive knowledge, deny God having favoured a few by bringing them out from higher parts of His body.

The Gurus argue that the false notion of superiority of certain castes over the others gives rise to pride and that this pride (ahankar) would be harmful for the realization of the Ideal. Guru Ardas advises, "Be not proud of thy caste; he alone is Brahmin who knoweth Brahma, the only God. 0 unwise one, be not proud of thy caste, for a myriad errors flow out of this pride."

Finally, it is held in Sikhism that the caste is of no consideration in the realization of the ideal. Men of the so-called low caste need not wait to be born again in the next higher caste for the attainment of liberation and spiritual realization. It is declared in the Adi Granth that "whosoever contemplateth God, caste or no caste, he is a perfect man of God." The point is further reinforced by reference to the Hindu fables. It is said, "Whosoever is the devotee of God, one must worship him and mind not

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1 Ibid., Var of Sri Rag, Shaloka M.1 (1-3), p. 88.
2 Ibid., Rag Bhairo M. 3 (1), p. 1128.
high or low caste of a devotee; as Sukhdeva (a brahmin) stuck to Janaka and Janaka himself annotated his forehead with the dust of nine seers.\(^1\) Bhagat Kabir declares, "I am a weaver by caste but patient in mind. And so I utter the Lord's praise in a state of utter poise."\(^2\) A similar lack of concern for any stigma of the low caste is shown by Bhagat Ravidas when he declares, "I am of low caste, with little honour, my birth is low. And still ... I am bound to Thee with the string of Thy love."\(^3\)

Bhai Gurdas brings out this aspect very clearly when he explains, "As the nature of the utensil has no bearing on the purity of the butter-fat (ghee), similarly for the holy men, castes have no meaning."\(^4\) He then cites the cases where great saints were born in the so-called low castes and yet reached the high stages of perfection.\(^5\) Here we see a clear trend where the low, according to the caste system, are exalted.\(^6\)

The comparatively greater importance given to the lower one is also seen in the utterances of Guru Nanak. He

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2. Ibid., Gauri Kabir ji (3-26), p. 328.
3. Ibid., Bhagat Ravidas (3 & 4-3), p. 486.
5. Ibid., stanza 15, Var 12.
6. Ibid., stanza 6, Var 25.
says, "If he be of a high caste and serveth God I can utter not his praise nor fathom his glory; and if he be of a low caste and serveth God, then I would indeed offer my skin to be made his footwear."¹

The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, effected the practical and revolutionary step by declaring caste as a taboo in the Order of the Khalsa consolidated by him. He says, "True service is the service of these people: I am not inclined to serve others of higher castes; charity will bear fruit, in this and the next world, if given to such worthy people as these. All other sacrifices and charities are profitless. From top to toe, whatever I call my own, all I possess or carry, I dedicate to these people." Could this be tolerated by the high caste Brahmin? Guru Gobind Singh adds to the above passage, "Hearing this the learned Brahmin was ablaze. Malice boiled in him and anger burnt as briskly as straw burns in flame. He could not bear the thought that by such levelling of castes the Brahmins might lose their livelihood. The Pundit wept and wailed at the plight of his neglected order."² Again in Akal Ustat, Guru Gobind Singh says, "There is no consideration of caste or membership of varnas."³

¹Adi Granth, Malhar M.1 (4-1-6), p. 1256.
³Guru Gobind Singh, Akal Ustat, 15: 175.
In the formulation of the life-rules (Rabitnamas) the compilers are faithful to the resolve of Guru Gobind Singh when he declares, "I will not adopt the habits of any creed, but will sow the seeds of the pure love of God." The first of the Sikhs baptized into the Order of the Khalsa, also included those Hindus who, according to the varna theory, belonged to the lower castes. The theory of separate duties for different castes was replaced by the same ethical and religious duties for all men, and the fundamental equality of all men was sought to be ensured by free and voluntary admission to the Order of the Khalsa.

And when the brahmans refused to educate the members of this Order, which included persons of the so-called lower castes, some men were sent to Kashi, the seat of learning in India at that time, to obtain education and then to serve as educators without the distinctions of caste or birth. It is what Bhai Gurdas says, "Gurmukh becomes a pundit and preaches to the world. All the four varnas are given the same message of peace." The rejection of the caste system is also incorporated in the code of conduct, the Sikh Habit Maryada, compiled under the warrant of the

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1 Guru Gobind Singh, Vachiternatak, chap 6, verse 34.
2 The present tradition of Nirmalas in Sikhism is generally traced to these pioneers of education among the Sikhs.
3 Bhai Gurdas, Var, stanza 18, Var 19; also stanza 19, Var 23.
Shromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar.¹

However, I have come upon a manuscript copy of the Rajhitnama claimed to have been written by Bhai Chopra Singh on dictation from Guru Gobind Singh.² (See Chapter 5, supra.) The writer of this copy of the text seems to give some consideration to the caste when he writes a Brahmin is converted to Sikhism, double service ought to be rendered unto him, which will accrue into double gain.³ We also find the Sikhs advised to get their marriages solemnised through


²This unpublished manuscript, serial number 6124, kept in the Sikh Reference and Research Library, Golden Temple, Amritsar is a part of the manuscript which consists of a total of 104 folios. The Rajhitnama by Chopra Singh is from folio 1 to 96 and from folio 97 to 104 it contains another Rajhitnama of Nandi Lal, a close associate and court bard of Guru Gobind Singh. This Rajhitnama of Chopra Singh is most likely the nearest copy of the original one with some interpolations by the copyist. The possibility of its being the nearest to the original is increased when we find a reference to it made by Tara Singh Narotam wherein he states that the Rajhitnama of Chopra Singh contains the hymns of the Adi Granth (p. 116). Also there is a reference by Baba Sumer Singh in the Sri Guru Tirath Sangrah made to this Rajhitnama which is said to be in accordance with the teachings of the Adi Granth. The manuscript number 6124 also contains the hymns of the Adi Granth. This fact may reinforce our inference that Tara Singh Narotam and Baba Sumer Singh are referring to a copy similar to the one numbered as 6124. We, however, find some spelling mistakes in the case of quotations of the hymns from the Adi Granth, as well as a few substitutions for synonymous terms in place of those used in the Adi Granth. This copy, therefore, seems to be the nearest to the original one, though for the reasons stated in the text of this thesis, it cannot be taken for the original itself.

³Chopa Singh, Rajhitnama, unpublished MS. No. 6124 (Amritsar: Sikh Reference and Research Library), p. 6
Brahmins though some one has in lead pencil added the Punjabi word 'Na' in the margin to change the quality of the proposition into the negative. This addition is clearly of a recent time since the whole manuscript is in old black ink and this addition is in black lead pencil. It is also possible that some reader has interpolated in recent time.

We also find in this manuscript that the Sikhs are advised to marry within their 'baran'. The author clarifies that "one ought to marry within one's own varnasram, kul, so that the Sikh may not get a bad name."  

The first two references can be seen to be complimentary to the Brahmins and the last in a vague manner accepts the broad implications of the caste system. As the Rahitnama by Chopa Singh is generally held in high esteem among the Sikhs the occurrence of these two passages lending some tacit acceptance of the caste system by giving some priority to the Brahmins has to be explained. There can be two possibilities in this regard: (1) these references are the additions by the copyist, and (2) these are genuine concessions to the Brahmins to encourage their conversion to Sikhism as they constituted the learned class. The second possibility seems to be rather remote as we do not find similar concessions in any other Rahitnmas, compiled by contemporaries of Chopa Singh. On the other hand, we come

1 Ibid., p. 7 (reverse).
2 Ibid., p. 4 (reverse) baran means varan here.
across a passage in the *Rahitnama* of Bhai Nand Lal, the court-bard of Guru Gobind Singh, wherein Guru Gobind Singh is reported to have addressed Nand Lal in the following terms, "Listen Nand Lal, I would unite the four varnas in one and lead them to adhere to one God."¹ Nand Lal was a contemporary of Gopa Singh, and in case any inequality in terms of Varnas was to be accepted in Sikhism, he ought not to have written in the categorical terms above. Besides this we have already noticed the outright rejection of caste by Guru Gobind Singh.

The second test in Sikhism, to determine the validity of an injunction is to see whether it is in accordance with the "Gurbani" (teachings of the Gurus. Generally, Gurbani refers to the *Adi Granth*). We have already examined the views of the *Adi Granth* about the caste and have seen that the institution has been repudiated overwhelmingly. Therefore, the passage under reference would be clearly interpreted as alien to the general spirit of Sikhism and the Gurbani and hence, unacceptable as authentic. Furthermore, these injunctions do not occur in another manuscript copy of this *Rahitnama*, which is kept in the personal library of the Bhai Sahib of Bagrian. It is an un-numbered manuscript in Panjabi and contains the transcription of other *Rahitnamas*


²This is the test which Bhai Jodh Singh favours in this respect. *Gurmats Nirnai* (Ludhiana: Lahore Book Shop n.d.), p. 282.
as well. But while these Rahitnamas have otherwise almost identical injunctions the injunctions concerning any concessions to the Brahmin (Hindu priest and the highest in the caste system) are not traceable.

Similar is the case of the Rahitnama included by Bhai Kahan Singh in Gurmatsudhakar where also these injunctions are not to be found. Lastly, we have already seen that the institution of the Khalsa (institutionalised form of Sikhism), as proclaimed by Guru Gobind Singh, is for the avowed purpose of obliterating the caste inequalities. Therefore, Chopan Singh, who claims to look up to Guru Gobind Singh for light, could not have obtained the 'light' from the Guru and yet in his code sought to undo and reverse one of the most fundamental principles of Sikhism as reaffirmed by Guru Gobind Singh. We may, therefore, not rule out the possibility that this concession inserted in the text is a later interpolation, perhaps by some later convert to Sikhism, who was assigned the task of copying the Rahitnama under reference. The concession to Brahmans may be due to the favourable orientation towards them by this scribe.

We may, therefore, conclude that the caste system as a whole is rejected in Sikhism. In so rejecting it, the Sikhs mark their departure from the traditional "objective ethics or ethical division of the society of the Hindus". The vacuum so created in Sikhism by the outright non-acceptance

1Guru Gobind Singh, Swayyga, 17.
of the traditional institution of varna dharma is filled in by laying down equality (brabri) as the ethical principle of social relations.

6.7: **Equality among classes in Sikhism**

Wealth also provides a determinant of social classes, as against birth in case of caste system, though social classification on the basis of wealth would be more flexible as wealth is concrete and acquirable and a separable accident whereas birth is an inseparable accident.

In Sikhism the relation among classes based on economic resources or wealth consideration is envisaged in terms of equality. It rejects the notion of the superiority of the economically better placed class over the others. Guru Arjan Dev says, "The wise of the God looketh upon all alike, like the wind that waves alike for the commoner and the king."¹ Bhai Gurdas, similarly, proclaims the dictum of "Raja-runk brabri" (equality of a king and a commoner).² It seeks to remove the traditional claim of the better placed to a different and more favourable consideration. The age old hatred of the poor, some superstition that the poor are unfortunate or their poverty in any manner representative of some evil deeds in the past life, is repudiated in Sikhism. The sympathetic inclination, as in Christianity, is towards the humble and poor. The attempt

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² *Bhai Gurdas, Varq*, stanza 20, Var 23.
is made in Sikhism to institutionalise this equality through various practices. Thus in Sikhism the higher classes are not governed by any separate code of ethics. The king is not above any consideration. As Kapur Singh remarks, "Though men are not equal in ability, they are entitled to equal judgment and value and social equality."1

The Gurus also appear to presume that the notion of superiority of classes may arise when one forgets that one's life is rather short and death would level the so-called superiority of the classes. This notion is high-lighted in the Adi Granth and Guru Nanak says, "One liveth not ever in the world: Neither king nor beggars would remain, they all come and go age after age."2 Therefore, improper consideration of the superiority of rank are based on a wrong conception of the nature of the world. It is maintained in the first instance that the possession of wealth is not permanent as "neither the kings nor the commoner remain in this world for ever neither the rich nor the poor, when comes one's turn, then nothing is there to help."3 Thus the ephemeral nature of human life is sought to be made the basis of the declaration that any pride in the superiority of the classes is futile.

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2Adi Granth, Ramkali M.1, (11), p. 931.
3Ibid. (44), p. 936.
The moral person, according to the Gurus, is one who treats all in terms of equality. Guru Nanak says, "A True yogi (perfect person) is one who looketh upon all creation alike" ("Ek drist har samsar jane jogi kahia soi"). And approvingly the Guru mentions the panth of yogis, the name of which is followed by "aie", such as 'bal gadie' ("Aie panthi sagal jamati mun jeete jug jeet"). This panth of yogi, out of the twelve, is renowned for its toleration, sincerity and treatment of all as equal. The need for the recognition of the human dignity irrespective of economic classes, is also stressed in an anecdote from Guru Nanak's biography called Bhai Lalo and Malik Bhago's Parsang. In this incident, Guru Nanak is reported to have refused a rather sumptuous dinner of Malik Bhago for the ordinary bread of coarse grain of Bhai Lalo. The moral is drawn that the poor ought not to be treated as low, morally and socially. All ought to be treated as equal irrespective of their material resources. Guru Arjan Dev says, "The wise of the God looketh upon all alike, such as the wind that waveth alike for the commoner and the king." In the same

1Ibid., Suhi M.i (2-1-8), p. 730.
2Ibid., Japji (28), p. 6.
3Sabadartha (Lahore: Sabadartha Gurbani Trust, 1944), p.6 note.
4Bhai Santokh Singh, Suraj Prakash (Amritsar: Chatar Singh Jivan Singh), pp. 65-73. The moral is also drawn from this episode that the honestly earned wages have some moral superiority over those which may be earned through unscrupulous means.
treats all alike, in the similar way, the wise in God treats all alike.

The examples cited above are simple and are merely meant to stress the need for treating members of different classes as morally equal. It is more a normative prescription than any mere statement of fact or event. The general idea appears to be that of establishing communication among all men irrespective of their material possessions. It is the recognition of the human dignity which transcends any extraneous considerations.

Institution of langar (community kitchen) — a practical step

The institution of langar (community kitchen) was initiated by Guru Nanak and its consolidation and extension was effected by the Third Guru, Amardas (1479-1574). The common social dinner and kitchen is to serve as a medium of social integration between the monarch and the commoner ("Rana runk brabri"). The rules of the langar require that all should sit together at one place and partake of the same food without any distinctions of the high or the low. This practice has been carried on and fortified by the rest of the Gurus and is an integral part of Sikhism now. An Indian scholar, Radhakamal Mukerjee has remarked that "The institution of langar, or the community kitchen, where prince and peasant, rich or poor, high and low born could
ness together without social distinction, fostered a spirit of charity on a large scale and also became a powerful binding force."¹

The tenet of equality and social integration by helping the needy was seized by the various compilers of the Rabitnmas (life-rules). Bhai Nand Lal thus lays down, "Do not show disdain for the poor."² And also, that one should not miss to help the needy."³ According to his code, "A true Sikh is one who helps the helpless and needy."⁴ He also prohibits any discrimination among the congregation while distributing the prasad⁵ (an offering to the Guru which is redistributed among the congregation). The compiler of Premsumarag similarly requires the persons to share their resources with the "naked and the hungry". He says that "if there is an occasion of helping the others then a person should take it as a kindness of God in having provided him with an opportunity to be of help to the needy."⁶

²Nand Lal, "Ath Tankanama", ed. Sant Sampuran Singh, Rabitnmas (Amritsar: Jawahar Singh Kirpal Singh) p. 80; "Nirdhan dekh na pas bahava, so tankhahia mool bahava".
³Ibid.
⁴Ibid.
⁵Ibid.
Thus an ideal integration on the basis of equality is sought to be introduced through simple but effective moral precepts. The bond of integration is to be realized by mutual help. Even the community kitchen is run with the help and contribution of all and not by any one particular person only. The compiler of Premsumarak appears to be anxious to ensure that this help to the needy may not give rise to any feeling of pride in the person so helping others. According to him, the desire to help others should be a part of one's nature in view of the recognition that all ought to be treated as equals in human dignity.

Can the langar or the community kitchen be regarded as a parallel to communes or indicative of levelling the economic disparities? The material available in the literature of Sikhism does not appear to provide for any redistribution of wealth. Dining in langar is representative only of an acknowledgement of social equality and integration. No such injunction of Guru Amardas or that of the earlier and the later Gurus is traceable which requires that food ought always to be cooked centrally and distributed centrally. Langar was usually run for those visiting the Guru or the needy and this practice continues even now.

The dictum of raja runk brabri may, however, be in sympathy with the modern schemes of social security and mutual help. There are specific injunctions in the Rabitnamas...
where the help to the needy is stressed. One may also find in the langar a continuous reminder of the social equality of all. Secondly, this institution provides against the immoral social practice of untouchability which is a by-product of the caste system.

There is another provision in Sikhism whereby the needy may be rendered assistance out of the church collections but, since these collections do not come exclusively from the wealthy class, assistance out of those funds cannot be taken as a help from the richer to the poor. It is rather a sort of mutual help.

In the Rahitnama of Bhai Desa Singh we find injunctions, "If you have wealth, support the poor Sikhs also," or, "Entertain a stranger Sikh." Daya Singh lays down, "A Sikh should regard other Sikhs as his equals." Both of these compilers seem to be more concerned with the conduct of the common brotherhood of the Khalsa and, therefore, may appear here to be rather emphasizing equality among the Sikhs. This cannot be taken as indicative of any conscious acceptance by these writers of inequality between the Sikhs and the others. On the other hand the fact of the compilers being relatively more concerned with the brotherhood of the Sikhs, rather than the universal brotherhood, cannot be completely denied because we find in the Rahitnama of Desa Singh at least other injunctions, such as, "A Sikh should employ only Sikhs for jobs," and, "A Sikh should not break promise given to the other Sikhs." These injunctions may indicate that the ideal of equilatarian brotherhood of mankind was slowly leading to the equilatarian brotherhood of the Sikhs, at least so in the compilations of the post-Gobind Singh era. There is of course the possibility that Desa Singh was formulating a code exclusively for interpersonal relations among the Sikhs and, therefore, wrote with a limited scope and definite purpose.

We may refer here to a similar injunction in Christianity, "Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Gal. 6: 2, 9, 10.
Secondly, the dictum that we all have common spiritual origin, and are thus members of the cosmic brotherhood, entails that mutual help and harmony is contributive to the unification of that which in reality is unified and appear separated only under the influence of human (I-am-ness).

We may, therefore, conclude that equality of the economically based classes is in terms of the social equality and human dignity and this ought to be realized in the conduct of a person. It also requires the voluntary and unrestricted help by those in a position to those in need. This ought not to be regarded as charity but ought to be out of the awareness that the other is as much one's part as one's own self because all are united in the terms of a Whole Self.

**Equality of the Guru and the Disciple**

The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh has reiterated another kind of spiritual equality, in that, after administering baptism to the first five entrants to the Khalsa, he himself partook of the same baptism, which was administered to him by the former. Thus the Guru-disciple relationship was also based on equality.

In social and religious congregations called sadh-sangat in Sikhism the distinction of rank is obliterated

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1Bhai Gurdas, Vers, 41. This var 41 is a later addition of some poet by the name of Gurdas and has been appended to the Vers of Bhai Gurdas. The incident cited above, however, is an historical fact.
and the monarch and the commoner are treated alike. This practice is similar to the ones found in Christianity and Islam.

6.8: Relation among men of different religions and nationalities

Historically at the time of the emergence and subsequent development of the Sikh ethics there were, in India, many prevalent religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Jainism. However, the struggle for the most part was between Hinduism and Islam, the latter being the religion professed by the more powerful rulers of India. The Sikh ethics has sought to integrate all in terms of equality as it was envisaged in the case of caste and class relations. Discoursing about the merit of men professing different religions Guru Gobind Singh held, "One may be a Hindu or a Muslim, all human beings belong to one brotherhood of mankind."\(^1\) Bhai Gurdas reports, when Guru Nanak was asked at Mecca whether Islam was superior or Hinduism, the Guru pointed out that the worth was of the followers and not of the creeds; a wrong act as wrong, by whomsoever done; and just as non-fast colour is washed away easily similarly

\(^1\)Guru Gobind Singh, Dasam Granth. "Hind-o-Turk, kuo Bajji, Imam Safi, manus ki jat sabhe ek hi pahchanbo."

This is par excellence an example of the Guru's conquest of his own personal feelings and also a complete absence in him of bitterness towards the Mughals even while they had brick-lined alive two of his four sons and killed the other two in an encounter. This came at the top of some of the most serious persecutions directed against him and the Sikhs.
the religious labels are temporary,\(^1\) which goes to show that none is better without good deeds and with good deeds all are equally good.\(^2\)

In rigid conformity with the ethical universalism the tenth Guru has proclaimed, "God is in the Hindu temple as well as in the mosque. God is addressed in both the Hindu and the Muslim prayer; all men are one though they may appear different. The Hindus and the Muslims are all one though they may have different habits under the influence of different environments. They are also compounded of the same four elements, earth, air, fire and water. The Koran and the Puranas (the scriptures of the Muslims and the Hindus, respectively) praise the same God. They are all of one form and One God made them all.\(^3\)

This unequivocal declaration leaves no scope for doubting the conclusion that men of all faiths and nationalities are equal. Consideration of merit alone is the criterion of judgment, irrespective of religion and nationality, as laid down by Bhai Gurdas, when he remarks, "There are in the world many Sunis, Christians, Musais, Rafzis and those who have no faith in doomsday. Numberless are the Ferangis, Arminians, Romans, Africans, Saids, Turks, Mughals, Pathans, Kilmaks. But whatever and wherever they may be

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\(^1\)Bhai Gurdas, Var, stanza 33, Var 1.

\(^2\)Guru Gobind Singh, Akal Ustat, 86, 16.
their merit and demerit cannot remain undiscovered. The attempt is thus made to transcend the creed labels and the geographical consideration to assert the fundamental equality in terms of the ethical perfection.

An injunction based on this tenet is formulated in Premsumarag which requires, "when a stranger, that is, a person of other religion and nation comes to the Sikhs they should accord full respect and cordiality as this would make a Sikh perfect." A slightly different formulation is found in the Sikh Rahit Maryada which requires that though the Sikhs ought to maintain a distinctive way of life, they ought not cause injury to the feelings of the followers of other religions. The injunction also requires a sense of toleration and advocates irenic co-existence which may be the result of the proclamation of Guru Gobind Singh cited above. Religious bitterness and strife according to these injunctions are, therefore, ethically un-sikh.

6.9: Status of woman in society

The next question in the Sikh ethics is to express its opinion on the ethical question of the relative position

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1 Bhai Gurdas, Var, stanza 16, Var 8. "Neki badi na luka lukai."


of woman in society. Necessity for it arose due to the conflicting views prevalent about it at the time of the emergence of Sikhism. The social relationship of man and woman is permanent and enduring and it may provide the clue to the moral basis of social relations at large. In order to appreciate the contribution of Sikhism it may be necessary to trace the general background of the status of woman in India.

The position of woman in the society has not been always the same and while at times she has been accorded a very high status there are also historical and scriptural instances when under some influences she has been relegated to an inferior position. One may often find that in different Hindu scriptures conflicting opinions have been expressed, though it is now generally believed that "in the Epic period women did not suffer from any special disabili- ities as they practised austerities and wore garments (valkala). Dhitavat, Srutavati, Sulabha remained unmarried and pursued the life of Spirit."¹ We also find that "in Satpatha Brahmana when the husband is about to ascend the sacrificial altar he addresses his wife thus, 'Come dear, let us ascend to heavens' and the wife says, 'Yes, let us ascend'."² This may show that women shared equal responsibilities and duties.

²P.H. Valvalkar, op. cit., p. 260.
In the *Rig Veda* husband and wife are described as taking equal part in the sacrificial rites. The dāmpati (the householder and his wife) together prepare and offer the adoration to the God. One may also find that "during the vedic period, ... the position of women was generally not unequal to that of the men, she had similar education as men, she took part in philosophic debates like men and with men; This shows that men and women were regarded as having equally important status in the social life of the early period." In the case of Smritis, however, the conflicting commands are very clear. In some it is held, "Women are to be honoured and adorned by fathers, brothers, by husbands and also brothers-in-law." Also, "Where women are honoured the gods rejoice; where they are not honoured, all religious rites are of no avail." Similarly, we find Varahmihara (Sixth century) ... declaring "that the pursuit of the ends of dharma (righteousness) and artha (wealth) depends on women and that they are essential for human progress."  

However, in some of the other *smritis* a relatively lower status has been accorded to women in general. Many

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1. *Rig Veda*, viii, 31,5; c.f. also x, 186, 27,7.  
of the remarks are directed towards depriving women of the right to worship or other religious rituals, as, "sacrifice by a woman displeases the gods" or "the women who burn oblation will sink into hell. We also find that in case of woman certain sanctifying ritual has to be performed without the recitation of sacred texts (unlike men). She is not to be initiated and her marriage ceremony is to be regarded as equivalent to the male initiation ceremony. "Her service of the husband is considered to be equal to the service of the Guru and the daily household duties are equated to the daily liturgy."

In various other texts, however, she is not only deprived of participation in religious sacrifices but she is described as an instrument of service to the male irrespective of the latter's attitude toward her.

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1 Manu, iv, 206.
2 Ibid., xi, 36-37.
3 Ibid., ii, 67, c.f. Yaj. i, 13; Vasishtha, xxii, 32.
4 In rather recent times Mahatma Gandhi showed great repugnance for certain disabilities against women inscribed in the old literature and remarked, "It is sad to think that the 'Smritis' contain texts which can command no respect from men who cherish the liberty of woman as their own and who regard her as the mother of the race." (article, Harijan, dated 28th November, 1936). What led to this article was the publication in another Indian paper, the 'Indian Swarajya', of certain scriptural extracts which were, "The wife should ever treat the husband as God, though he be characterless, sensual and devoid of good qualities" (Manu, 5-154); "Women should follow the word of their husbands. This is their highest duty (Yajnavalkya, i-18). "She who fasts and performs rituals, while the husband lives, cuts off the life of the
The Ideal of asceticism and renunciation (sanyasa) had also its impact on the attitude towards women. The inherent attraction of the female was considered to be a temptation, something against which the sanyasi must be warned and to which he must not be attracted. The woman was thus called a "seducer" and it was said that "for that reason the wise never remain unguarded in the company of females, as women could lead astray not only the unwise and ignorant but even the learned men and make them a slave of lust and anger." It is for this reason that the same Smriti advises also that "one should not sit in a lonely place with even one's own mother, sister or daughter; for the senses are powerful and master even a learned man."  

husband. She goes to hell"; "There is no higher world for the woman than that of the husband. She who displeases the husband cannot go to his world after death. So she should never displeas the husband (Vasishtha, 21-14); "The woman who prides in her father's family and disobeys the husband should be made by the king a prey to the dogs in the presence of a big assembly of people" (Manu, 9-371); "None should eat the food offered by a woman who disobeys the husband. Such a woman is to be known as a sensualist" (Angiras, 69) and "If the wife disobeys the husband when he is given to bad habits or becomes a drunkard or is suffering from physical ailment, then, for three months she should be deprived of her valuable clothes and jewels and kept away." (Manu, 10-78).


1 Manu, 11-214.
2 Ibid., 11-215.
If we direct our attention to the position of women in India in relation to the scheme of ashramas we find that women along with sudras (the lowest caste) are not taken into account so far as the management of life through the ashrama stages is concerned although it must be conceded that there is some historical evidence that Vanaprasthasrama and even Sanyasasrama were availed of by certain women during the early Vedic period. Thus apart from some period here and there women have enjoyed high position in Hinduism and particularly during the early Vedic period their position was respectable. It is around the time of the Mahabharata that the status of women seems to have been lowered.

Sikh view about the status of women

In such a background of conflicting opinions and injunctions we have to consider the views of Sikhism in regard to the status of women in society. As renunciation and asceticism is not the ideal in Sikhism the root cause which perhaps partly led to the women being considered seducers or temptresses ('paramada') is removed. Again the restoration by Sikhism of the ideal of the life of the householder as superior, morally and spiritually, led to the restoration of the decent and equal status to women. Dorothy Field, writing about Sikhism, remarks, "The most notable social improvement was the emancipation of women." Many women found

salvation through the Guru’s teachings.”¹ We find that Guru Nanak protests against any consideration of the woman as inferior. He says, “From the woman is our birth; in the woman’s womb are we shaped. To the woman are we engaged; to the woman are we wedded. The woman, yea, is our friend and from woman is the family. If one woman dies, we seek another through the woman are the bonds of the world. O Why call woman evil who giveth birth to kings? From the woman is the woman, without the woman there is none.”² This declaration shows unequivocally the high esteem in which a woman is required to be held in Sikhism.

We find that the socio-religious rehabilitation of women came with the theistic inspired devotional tradition within Hinduism itself.³

In Sikhism, however, more widespread and practical steps are advised to be taken for the socio-religious equality of woman. In this connection we find frequent and large number of imperatives against some unethical practices involving woman. In the various moral codes of the Sikhs a large number of injunctions deal with the

³Radhakamal Mukerjee, op. cit., p. 321. He remarks, “In the wake of new emerging Bhakti tradition came the emancipation of woman ... The important position Ramananda (whose hymn has been included in the Adi Granth) assigned to women by designating two of them as his apostles was of greatest social significance.”
The Sikhs also permitted widow re-marriage whereby the widow could be rehabilitated, if she so desired. In order to appreciate the great stress in Sikhism on proper moral practices and also its keenness to ensure equal and respectable status for women we may examine the above cited evil practices and bring out the role played by Sikhism in their rejection and moral condemnation.

**Kuri marna (female infanticide)**

The practice of female infanticide is an unethical practice which is said to have been carried on in the past in many countries besides India. It is traced to various causes. But whatever is the cause the moral horror over it will remain undisputed. We may examine the various causes in order to appreciate the practical steps envisaged in the Sikh ethics for the removal of this evil.

A scholar suggests that "in Rome, Greece, Arabia, India and China women of the upper classes, relieved by the males of the harder tasks both as an effort to keep them young and as a sign of rank, became an economic burden and consequently infanticide fell mainly on the females." He also holds that "the necessity of finding a dowry for daughters contributed to a selection of female children for
infanticide in China and India."

Secondly, the cause is also traced to the ancestor cults. According to the same scholar, "The ancestor cults of Greece, Rome, India and China could be transmitted only through the males and this also resulted in the destruction of girl infants." The first contention in terms of economic causes is also supported from a study of the Australian aborigines. The study reports that where women are indispensable for the food supply, there is no discrimination in infanticide made between the sexes. An Indian historian also cites the difficulty of marrying off a girl as another of the causes of this practice.

The third cause for this practice in respect to India is attributed by R. Fick to the injunctions of ancient scriptures. This is perhaps the most serious conjecture hazarded and we must examine it here in order to dispel the wrong belief which may be created by such a declaration. Let us see how Fick seeks to establish his contention that female infanticide in India had been based on ancient Hindu scriptures.

2. Ibid., p. 27.
R. Fick has quoted three ancient Hindu scriptures to establish that according to them people were asked to "expose a new born female child but not a male."\(^1\) The way the scholar has put the proposition it appears to be a categorical imperative of the ancient scripture commanding people to commit female infanticide but not male infanticide. The three ancient scriptures quoted by the scholar for this proposition are, Taitt. Samh. vi, 5.10.3; Kath S. xxvii, 9; and Yaska Nir. 3.4. He does not mention the fourth, namely, Maitrayani Samhitta. iv, 6,4; 7,9. Here it may be pertinent to point out that in fact it is almost the same line which occurs in the four scriptures and thus instead of saying that four different scriptures command, what Fick has wrongly called female exposure, it would be more appropriate if we were to say that it is the same line which occurs in the four different texts. This would enable us to concentrate on one line and see whether it can be interpreted in the meanings which are accepted by Fick.

The question may now be taken up whether the line under reference can be rendered as "expose a new born female child but not male". It may be stated here that these meanings have not been accepted generally and scholars have rendered this line differently. For example, we find that Keith translates this line as "therefore they deposit a daughter on birth, a son they lift up". In foot note I (on this

\(^1\)Ibid.
(translation) he clarifies, "This phrase found also in KS and MS does not refer to the exposure of female children as formerly held; See Vedic Index 1.487, and contrast Weber Ind. Stud. IX, 481". Similarly, it is held by the scholars Macdonald and Keith (Vedic Index, Vol. I, p. 487) that "there is no proof that the Vedic Indians practised the exposure of female children. This conclusion deduced from certain passages in the later Samhitas by Zimmer (Altindisch-ches Leben, 319) and Delbruck (see note №. 131 in the Vedic Index I, p. 487) has been disproved by Bohtlingk (Z.D.M.G. Vol. 44, pp. 494-96 given in note 131 in Vedic Index, Vol. I, p. 487)."

What would then be a more appropriate view? We may say that it is wrong to maintain, as Fick does, that scriptures commanded or supported female infanticide. The line correctly interpreted may mean that they simply put aside a daughter on her birth without any rejoicing or any 'jat karma', that is, the celebrations which usually attended the birth of a son. Similarly, when this line occurs in the Niryukt it is quoted to argue that since they give a daughter away to another man (in marriage), therefore, she is not entitled to inherit paternal property. We may, therefore, rule out completely the possibility mooted by R. Fick that scriptures commanded or supported this unethical practice of female infanticide in India.
However, we may not deny the historical fact of the prevalence of the practice of female infanticide in India during a later period. And it is here that the great ethical reform enforced by Sikhism comes in. Incidentally, we may also mention that female infanticide was condemned by Mohammed Sahib, the founder of Islam. Reuben Levy refers to the wide prevalence in Arabia of "artificial restriction of the number of females."\(^1\) It is in view of this prevalent practice that Mohammed Sahib included injunctions against it in the Quran.\(^2\)

This immoral practice is denounced in Sikhism and various steps are envisaged for the eradication of female infanticide. In order to overcome the difficulty in terms of the requirement of dowry to be offered by the bride's father, it is laid down in Sikhism that "no dowry ought to be accepted from the bride's parents"\(^3\) and in arranging her marriage, social help is required to be offered to the parents of the daughter (and also the son) who may find difficulty in finding matches for their children. It is laid down that "if there is some difficulty in some one's marriage, then Sikhs ought to make efforts and take pains to arrange it in their own family or persuade others for

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\(^2\) *Quran*, Surah, XVII, 38.

\(^3\) *Sikh Rahit Maryada* (Amritsar: S.G.P.C.) p. 28, xii.
the same." The same compiler advises "against female infanticide."¹

Because many superstitions are at the root of the female infanticide imperatives are found in Sikhism against the entertainment of any superstition or the consultation of astrologers or soothsayers,² requiring further that "female infanticide should not be practised and social relation with persons indulging in it should not be maintained."³ Persons indulging in it are to be excommunicated from Sikhism permanently and those having any social relation with them are termed punishable ("tankhabia").⁴ It is declared by yet another compiler that "he who is a Sikh and deals with one indulging in female infanticide would be led to disaster ultimately ("ant khvar").⁵ In another formulary it is said, "Sikhs should not entertain even in mind the relationship with those indulging in female infanticide."⁶

The ethical judgment over this evil in Sikhism may

²Sikh Rahit Maryada, p. 22, iv.
³Ibid., p. 23, xi.
⁴Ibid., p. 37, xvi.
⁶Desa Singh, Ibid., p. 84, iii.
thus be seen to be severe and extensive. Moreover, as we
have seen apart from denouncing it, all the three possible
causes leading to infanticide, namely, the economic aspect,
the difficulty in finding the match and the superstition
are also sought to be effectively removed. In view of the
fact that the Sikh Gurus did not have political power to
translate their moral disapproval into legislation and make
infanticide unlawful, resort was had to the highest form
of social and moral disapproval, in terms of social disso-
ciation and excommunication.¹

Satti

It is strange that the term Satti which means a chaste
woman has, by a curious process, been applied to the practice
of burning chaste women along with the dead bodies of their
husbands.² Some vaguely similar customs have prevailed in
other countries of the world as well, such as, the death of
a king or a chief followed by the custom of immolation,
"either voluntary or forcible, of his wives, concubines,
attendants and servants so that they might keep company with
their deceased lord and serve him in the same way as on earth."³

¹This practice was finally declared illegal and termed
as murder, punishable as such, Refer, Bengal Regulations,
vi of 1802.

²R.C. Majumdar, op. cit., p. 822.

³Ibid., p. 822. Refer also to his statement that this
custom prevailed in India, China, Babylonia and many other
countries and there are still some remote traces of it in
'hara-kiri' or suicide of the devoted subjects with the
death of the ruler in Japan.
In the case of India, towards the close of the ancient period, some scriptural authority was appropriated to back the contention that self-immolation on the funeral pyre of her husband was the only meritorious course that a virtuous woman could follow. And further that "not only would such a woman enjoy eternal bliss in heaven along with her husband, but her action would expiate the sins of three generations of her husband's family both on his father's and mother's side."¹ Thus hope and encouragement was used to induce women for self-immolation to obtain the posthumous title of the virtuous (satti, truthful) woman, while there was no such requirement for a man on the death of his wife. The practice seems to be dated from a very early period. There is a detailed account, preserved by the Greek writers, of a case that occurred in the fourth century."²

It may be relevant to add here that in the laws of Manu while self-immolation by widows is exalted it is not declared to be obligatory and compulsory. We find the provision that "a virtuous wife who after the death of her husband constantly remains chaste, reaches heaven, though she have no son, just like those chaste men."³ Thus the laws of Manu visualise the possibility of a woman living after

¹Ibid., p. 823.
²Ibid., p. 823.
³Manu, V, 160.
the death of her husband. However, it is also laid down in the same code that "at her pleasure let her emaciate her body by (living on) pure flowers, roots and fruit, but she must never mention the name of another man after her husband has died."¹

This practice appears to be in vogue at the time of the emergence of Sikhism. We find reference to it in the Adi Granth but we do not find its mention in many of the Rahitnamas which could be due to its relatively lesser frequency at that time. However, in one Rahitnama, we do find reference to satti as a custom rejected in Sikhism.²

Guru Amar Das declares that "the satti is one who liveth contented and embellisheth herself with good conduct: and cherisheth the Lord ever and calleth on Him."³ As the advice of 'cherishing the Lord and calling on Him' is the advice to every one through out the Adi Granth, the above declaration requires the widows to conduct themselves as all others, do.

The view is expressed by the Guru that in order to be known as virtuous women ought to maintain familites knit by love. The separation on death also should be a matter of feelings. On the whole, according to the Guru,

¹Ibid., 157.
³Adi Granth, Var of Rag Suhi, Shaloka M.3 (2-6), p. 787.
the virtues of the housewife are to be in terms of her role in the family and not in terms of self-immolation. He says, "The women burn themselves on the pyres of their husbands. But if they love their spouses well, they suffer the pangs of separation even otherwise."

Practical steps to counter this immoral practice

Status of the widow and remarriage: In Sikhism the above immoral provision was sought to be fully discontinued. The practical solution came by permitting the re-marriage of widows just as in the case of widowers. It is, however, pointed out that the widow may re-marry if she herself so desires and she ought not to be forced for it. Giani Lal Singh of Bhasour, quotes Gaori of Guru Nanak from the Adi Granth in this connection. It is pointed out by him that the widow ought to have the right to exercise her option for remarriage whenever she wants it. Thus apart from expressing religious and moral disapproval of Sutti practical measures, such as, the option of widow remarriage as morally right were also taken to ensure a complete eradication of this moral evil, which evil, is also indicative of the unequal status of women in society. Here the laws of Manu

1Ibid., Var of Bag Suhis, Shaloka M.3 (3-6), p. 787.
2Sikh Rahit Marwada (S.G.P.C.), p. 28 (xiii)
may be referred to where he permits only the widowers to remarry. But in Sikhism both the parties (men and women) are given equal option in this regard.

Wearing of veils by women: Wearing of veils by women, as prominently seen with the followers of Islam, is also not accredited any recognition in Sikhism. It is a symbol of inequality between men and women. It is laid down in Sikhism that women ought not wear veils ("Purda" or "Ghund"). Whatever be the historical reasons for the practice it is indicative of restriction on the freedom of women and denial of equality.

Monogamy: It is held by the compilers of the different codes in Sikhism that under normal circumstances a Sikh ought not to marry when his first wife is alive. Monogamy

1 Manu, V, 168.

It is sometimes argued that the injunction about monogamy is difficult to maintain in Sikhism particularly in view of the general belief that the Sikh Gurus themselves married more than once. Bhai Jodh Singh, ex-Vice-Chancellor, Punjabi University, during a personal meeting between us supported the fact about the marriages of the Gurus and pointed out further that in view of this fact monogamy cannot be maintained as an ideal in Sikhism. Some other scholars of Sikhism, such as, Giani Lal Singh of Panch Khalsa Dewan, however, deny that the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, married more than one. But it may be pointed out to him that even if one may concede his view point in respect of the tenth Guru, he still fails to explain the case of another Guru who is also generally believed to have had more than one wife. But in view of the fact that monogamy is commanded in the Sikh Rahit Maryada we have to agree that it is the moral precept for the Sikh today.
is often held to be preferable on economic grounds and it may be inferred from this that where no such consideration exists polygamy may be indulged into. Guru Nanak, however, appears to advise against such consideration. In a discourse he refers to this question, thus: "What is the sign of overflowing (abundance), that one must have inexhaustible treasure of grain and his whole house is astir with wives, daughters and women! And every woman crieth over frivolities, and abundance of wives maketh the home & bedlam. And whosoever taketh, giveth not back, and man is ever uneasy, seeking to earn more and more."¹

The compiler of one code, however, seems to make a concession in the case of the ruler. It is said that if the ruler finds that there is no homogeniety of temperament between himself and his wife he may marry another woman. The only other ground for second marriage is the absence of a male issue. The compiler, however, remarks that "one who does not remarry even in the above circumstances and remains content with the first one, he indeed is a man of great self-restraint (jati). Such a man will be honoured ('bol tol main barkat hoi'). The contentment with one wife is the act of great men." It is further clarified by this compiler that in case the wife is able and obedient then


the person ought not to remarry under the impulse of lust (kam), as otherwise, he would regret it in the end ("ant aukha hosia, pachotava karsi").¹ These seem to be the checks placed by the compiler on his earlier concession to the ruler. Nevertheless, a similar concession to the commoner does not seem to have been made. The latitude for the ruler, therefore, could have been inspired by the influence of the princely states of the Sikhs which had been established by the time when this code was formulated or copied from some earlier one.²

Chastity

In respect to chastity it is laid down in Sikhism that it is not to be practised by women only. Both men and women should regard adultery as immoral. The compiler of Premumarag rather appears to lay greater emphasis on men to desist from it.³ In another life rule adultery is stated to be one of the five serious evils from which every one must desist.⁴ It is clarified by a compiler that there can be no relaxation in this regard even for the king or


²Bhai Kahan Singh fixes the date of its compilation during 1580-85 (Gurmatsudhakar, p. 445). The same is quoted by Randhir Singh, op. cit., p. 78.


the ruler. Chastity and fidelity, thus are important constituents of the sanctity of the family as well as social relations.

6.10: Universal brotherhood

The tenet of equality may appear to be rather formal and however necessary and fundamental for social relationships yet, by itself, it may not be considered as the final ideal by an ethical theory which regards the whole humanity and existence as spiritually related. The social ethics may thus be in need of content in addition to the formal equality. The equality may be maintained without feeling any affection or regard for the person who is so held to be equal. Such bare equality, however attractive it may be for a theorist of abstract polity, would not be of enough significance from the point of the ideal humanistic morality. The material content to the social ethics in Sikhism is also provided from the same premise of 'spiritual unity' which was used for pointing up human equality.

It is said that persons emanate from the same spiritual continuum and to the same ultimate source they will all be returning. The whole of humanity, therefore, is bound by a fraternal relationship. Guru Gobind Singh says, "As out of a single fire millions of sparks arise; arise

in separation but come together again when they fall back in the fire. As from a heap of dust, grains of dust swept up fill the air, and filling it fall in a heap of dust. As out of single stream countless waves rise up and being water, fall back in water again. So from God's form emerge alive and inanimate things and since they arise from Him, they shall fall in Him again. This statement is then made the basis of the assertion that all ought to treat every one else as member of same human brotherhood.

The purpose of going to the Guru is to learn from him the lesson that the fellow human being is not an 'other'. Guru Arjan Dev says, "Meeting with the Guru, I have abandoned the sense of the other." The other is in fact not an other but a co-sharer of the same source of emanation and a part of the same spiritual order. This brotherhood of humanity is thus linked together by bonds deeper than family or national affinities.

The argument of the Gurus seems to be that brotherhood is the reality but it is hidden from us by the veils of human (individuation or I-am-ness and mine-ness) which makes us see a brother as an other. Once this partitioning wall is felled ("kure tute pal") the relationship would be visible clearly. The whole of the social ethics of the Sikhs is oriented towards the demolition of this wall of

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1Guru Gobind Singh, Akal Ustat., 87.
separation; and the realization of 'wider and wider' identification is indicative of the progressive realization of the ideal. In order to bring to notice the common bonds of existence in the world, Guru Nanak says, "Air the guru, water the father, great earth the mother: In the lap of two nurses, night and day, the whole world is brought up (or plays)."\(^1\) The text may show not only the relation of mankind on a cosmic scale but also be a pointer that the mankind passes through common environment facing a destiny not unrelated with each other.

The brotherhood of mankind in terms of God being the common father is also stressed by Guru Nanak when he says, "Thou art the father of us all ... all are the partners, thou art alien to none."\(^2\) Here, as in Christianity, the fatherhood of God is brought to lay down the norm of conduct in terms of 'brotherhood'. In yet another passage it is repeated when Guru Arjan Dev says, "Thou art our only father, we are all they children."\(^3\)

6.11: Practical steps to realize human brotherhood

The Gurus do not rest content with a mere proclamation of the norm of brotherhood but also suggest practical measures to realize it. The measures are both negative as well as positive.

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Negative measures: The negative measures are, (1) complete renunciation of slander of others (ninda tyag), and (2) renunciation of enmity (nirvair).

Positive measures: The positive measures are (1) altruism (parupkar) and (2) service of humanity (seva).

6.12: Negative measures

Ninda tyag (renunciation of slander)

It is held by the Gurus that one of the great cause of mutual strife and bickering is the indulgence in slander. This evil may not only cause mutual distrust and suspicion among the smaller social groups but may also poison the social relations among much larger groups like different nations. Guru Arjan Dev says, "First I gave up the slander of others, and then all the cares of my mind were dispelled ... I have abandoned the companionship of ego, and, now the friend and the foe are alike to me ... "¹ Men too often forget the beam in their own eye but are keen to find out even a mote in others. This is the famous saying in Christianity as well.² The slanderer may start a chain of

²While analysing the Christian ethics it is said by George F. Thomas about the judgment which results from censoriousness, that it is "merciless and unforgiving." He says, "The fact that it leads one to arrogate to himself the function of judging which belongs to God alone indicates that its deepest root is pride. It is an expression of the egoism that exalts the self at the cost of depreciating others." (Emphasis added.) The consequences being the
vicious circle and thereby harm the social integration as well as take a person away from the realization of the spiritual unity of the humanity. The social value of the slanderer is affected considerably as he is then not considered as trustworthy. No one believes him. He thus becomes a sick member of the society needing help for his own recovery. There is also a fear that it may spread the disease among the other members of the society as well. It is in view of this moral evil of slander that Guru says, "The conduct of the slanderer is dirty." ("Nindak ka maila achar").

As pointed out above the Guru says that after the renunciation of minda (slander or backbiting) one would be able to realize the universal brotherhood as the friend and the foe would appear alike.

"Nirvair" (renunciation of enmity)

The development of enmity ("vair bhav") towards others is a direct contra of human brotherhood. The first attribute of the Absolute, which men are required to imbibe, is the complete eradication of enmity towards others and a complete check against its development in a person. Bhai Gurdas says, "It is a common practice that men return good


1 *Adi Granth*, Bhairo M. 5 (4-41-54), p. 1152.

for good done unto them. But I am sacrifice unto those who return good even for evil or who are good and kind even to the evil doers. Thus the person are required not to retaliate evil with evil but to return it with good. Only thus can a fellow being turned into enemy be won over.

Love is the panacea here. Even when evil has to be fought, it is to be done without any feeling of enmity towards the other person. Evil which may be resisted without saturating one's self with a feeling of hatred for the evil-doer. It is easier to love those who love us but the ideal is to love even the person who may not love us. It is in this sense that while discussing "ninda" (slander) we saw the Guru laying before us the need to look alike upon friend and foe. We will again have occasion to refer to this concept when we discuss three levels of the gurmukh (Section 12, infra).

Here it may be added that one who is kind to the kind ones and unkind to the unkind ones may be acting according to the principle of justice. But brotherly love rises above justice in a manner that it includes justice but so transforms it that it becomes consistent with the spiritual unity of mankind.

1Bhai Gurdas, Varz, Stanza 12, Var 20.

2Cf., also, "Love of one's enemies provides the acid test of whether one's love is a perfect love like God's or is restricted to those whom it is easy to love." George, F. Thomas, op. cit., p. 261.
Emmity is the desire to cause harm and pain to others. It is to wreck vengeance on some one. But it pointed out by Nand Lal that in case any man is injured it is the Creator who would be injured. The creator is the soul and life of creation ("Khaliq khalaq ki jan ke Khaliq dukhave nahi, Khaliq dukhave Nand Lal ji khalaq kope labe"). One ought to, therefore, eradicate completely any feeling of emmity and also guard against its development at any stage in life.

6:13: Positive measures

Parupkar (altruism)

Mere absence of enmity and slander, however, is not enough for the complete realization of human brotherhood. It must be, according to the Gurus, realized positively by altruistic activities and social service. In a different philosophical dialogue it is pointed out by Dewey that "the kind of self which is formed through action which is faithful to relations with others will be a fuller and broader self than one which is cultivated in isolation from or in opposition to the purposes and needs of others." In Sikhism the purpose of education is declared to be to initiate the person to altruism. Guru Nanak says "Altruism


is the essence of all knowledge" ("Vidya vichari tan parup-
kari"). It is the complete socialisation of the person indicated through his love and concern for the others. It is the test which Jean Mouroux lays down when he says that a person is never authentic in any way other than linking and giving himself to another person as with another self.

The test is the same in Sikhism. One of the most important and fundamental norms in the terms of which a person may be evaluated, is this giving away of one's self. Bhai Gurdas says, "The sign of a good man is that he has always welfare of others but the bad man is selfish. He does not do good to others." Parupkar, therefore, is the touchstone of moral development.

Need to avoid pity and pride in parupkar

The altruism involves the help of the fellow beings but there is the danger that this help may in fact appear to degenerate into a sort of 'social pity'. The essentials of altruism, on the other hand, require that the altruist ought not feel any glory in it. The second possibility which an altruist must guard against is the pride (hooman) which would be amounting to a good action either arising out of evil motive (pride) or leading to the development of an evil

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1 Adi Granth, Asa M. 1, Chaupadas, p. 356.
3 Bhai Gurdas, Var\(\text{\textscript{\texttimes}}\), Stanza 12, Var 20.
sentiment (pride). In order to guard against all these pitfalls the altruist is required to regard his altruism as an opportunity for receiving divine sanctification, since the Creator is there in all creation. The need to take it as an expression of divine grace is stressed in a moral code. The compiler says, "when the food is ready, pray for some needy person to come and share your food so that your food may be sanctified. It is further laid down that if a needy person turns up then consider him to be the answer to your prayer and serve him respectfully. In case no one comes you ought to go out and seek out one and if perchance none is available at that time keep some food separately and then whoever a Hindu, a Muslim or a Sikh comes, serve him the food. Such food is sanctified. ¹ In this way the person would be able to avoid the serious evils of pride and feeling of pity and the needy would command equal respect and dignity.

This ideal is also adopted in various other code formulations. Chopra Singh requires the Sikhs to consider help to the needy as a rendition unto the Guru. ("Guru ka Sikh garib ki rasna ko guru ki golak jana").² The compiler thus decries the hoarding of one's possession while his fellow beings may be in great distress. Garib ki rasna

(need of the needy) thus assumes as great importance as the treasury of the Guru and helping such a person would be a step in the right direction. Writing about such altruists P.V. Kanal says, "Such men not only relish the joy of disinterested service but also get out of the corroding worries of standing watch over their hearted but fruitless and thankless treasurers. Altruism is, indeed, the holiest spark in the life of a human soul."^4

We may also refer here to the formulation of Bhai Daya Singh. He is generally occupied with the injunctions concerning the regulation of inter-Sikh relations, but he too lays down, "To any one who needs help, render it unto him" ("Kisi ka karaj hove usko sware").^2 The quantitative term used by him in this case is kisi (any one) which shows his keen consciousness of according importance to altruism for all.

Similar views are found in the ethical formulations of Bhai Nand Lal. According to the compiler of "Premsumarag" the scope of altruism is very wide and includes every kind of assistance towards seeking the good of others. It lays down, "If somebody needs food or clothes or is needy otherwise, share your earnings with him. If somebody needs your help, do not tarry, leave your own work and go to his help."^3

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^1P.V. Kanal, Altruism (Moga: Dev Samaj, 1956), p. 64.
^3"Premsumarag", Bhai Kahan Singh, Gurmatsudhakar, para 631.
The author of Bhakataratnavali, a contemporary of the tenth Guru Gobind Singh, reports Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, as explaining that there is a hierarchy of three levels of the gurmukh (ideal person) and three levels of the manmukh (the self-willed, the evil self).

Three levels of the gurmukh

The three levels of the gurmukh, in the order of ascendancy, (1) gurmukh, (2) gurmukh tar and (3) gurmukh tum.

(1) Gurmukh: A gurmukh according to this description is "one who does good unto those who do good unto him and returns evil for evil". We may see that the agent here seems to be guided by the virtue of justice in a legalistic sense. The dictum 'do unto others as they do unto you' is the standard of human relation. This norm may be very useful but characterises an ethical man still at a lower stage.

(2) Gurmukh tar: A gurmukh tar is one who has turned his back to evil deeds (khote karam) and his face is towards the teachings of the Guru. If someone does even a single act of goodness unto him, the gurmukh tar would always (sadeev) do good to him. The gurmukh tar would never forget his gratitude to his benefactor and would always be ready to help his benefactor in return. He never prides himself for the good he does unto others. He is always willing and ready to help if someone needs his help.

(3) Gurmukh tum: The stage of the gurmukh tum is the apex of human altruism. He is full of wisdom also. He seeks the
good of others even if they may seek his evil. It is the highest stage of realization where the altruist is not even remotely affected by any distinction of friend and foe to which we had occasion to refer earlier also. His altruism becomes spontaneous.

**Three levels of the manmukh**

The three categories of the manmukh (the evil ones) are also on the similar ethical pattern, namely, (1) manmukh, (2) manmukh tar and (3) manmukh tum.

1. **Manmukh**: Manmukh are those individuals who habitually seek the evil of others. They do not remember the good done unto them but never forget the evil done to them. The scale of justice here may be seen to have become uneven in that the evil is returned by evil but the good is not returned by good.

2. **Manmukh tar**: Manmukh tar is lower in scale than the manmukh as he always gives evil in return both for the good as well as the evil done to him.

3. **Manmukh tum**: This is the lowest stage of evil to which a person can stoop down. In this category are included those persons who always return evil for any act of good done to them. For repeated good, they repeatedly return evil. They have no faith in the spiritual world. Their rationalization is that the spiritual world and the good of others is not fruitful (phalda) for them while the evil done by them to others always leads to their own good. Such
individuals are perenially condemned ones. The predominant idea in this classification may be seen to be in terms of altruism. Here doing good to others always is identified with the apex of altruism, the gurmukh tum. The gurmukh tum is not motivated by any personal good but the good of others becomes his nature. It is a sort of altruistic transformation of the whole self.

Another point which may be noted about this hierarchy is that the general population scatter may be towards the middle of this classification. The extreme cases or the persons belonging to the extreme categories may be comparatively much less though in itself it may not thereby decrease the value of the ideal of the Gurmukh tum.

It may be relevant to add here that in the above classification the term gurmukh is used in the special sense of the lowest stage in terms of altruistic activity. Generally, however, the term gurmukh is used very often to refer to the highest stage of self-hood and as a synonym of sachia (the ideal self).

We may also refer here to the stage of the gurmukh. Conduct of the person at this stage, as described by Guru Nanak in the Adi Granth, is that of the trader and not of the lover. Guru Nanak says, "Changge othanga kar mania mande manda hoi, ashak ehu na akhia je laikhe varte soi" (One who is good only when good is done to him and in

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adversity becomes adverse; call him not a lover for he trades in love. The ideal in the social ethics of the Sikhs, therefore, can only be the gurmukh tum.

This highest ideal of the social ethics of the Sikhs is also stressed by Bhai Gurdas. He says, "O, Rare is the one who does good even to those who may do bad, as the tree yields fruit even to those who may throw stones at it." The examples of the tree, the cotton seed and the chandan tree are quoted very extensively through out his Var to bring out the selfless seeking of the other's good.

Altruism in helping others to attain salvation (chutti)

Altruism even in seeking and obtaining salvation is stressed by the Gurus. In this the approach is similar to that of Mahayana Buddhism with particular reference to its Bodhisattava ideal. Like Buddhism in Sikhism also the person does not entertain an individualistic ideal of salvation. During the course of a sermon in Buddhism it is said, "Just so a Bodhisattva, after he has accomplished the practices which lead to the full enlightenment of Buddhahood, leads countless beings to Nirvana." Evidence in this regard comes to us from two different passages of the Adi Granth with identical wordings except

2 Bhai Gurdas, Var, Stanza 21, Var 9.
for the addition of one word hor which means others also. In a Shaloka Guru Nanak says "Nanak te mukh ujjale keti ohhuti nal." This passage is rendered as, "Glorious are their beings, Nanak, and they save many." The next Guru Angad Dev who succeeded Guru Nanak wrote the whole shaloka elsewhere in Adi Granth, but added the word "Hor" for the line to read as, "Nanak te mukh ujjale hor keti ohhuti nal." This may be translated as, "Glorious are their beings, Nanak, and they save many others also." Here it may be argued that the altruistic reference could also be clearly understood in the case of the first passage of Guru Nanak. The question may be asked as to why this term "hor" was added by Guru Angad Dev. The answer is not difficult to imagine. Guru Angad Dev by the addition of this word quite clearly brings out the extra-ordinary stress placed on altruism in Sikhism even while seeking salvation.

We may see a similar stress in the protest of Mahayana against the prataik Buddha of Himayana as too individualistic an approach. The altruistic ideal of Bodhisattava in Mahayana is the fruition of this protest.

In Christianity also the suffering of Jesus Christ is a similar pointer in the direction of altruism.

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1 Adi Granth, Shaloka, p. 8.
2 Ibid., Var of Majh, Shaloka M.2 (2-18), p. 146.
The second positive step towards the realization of human brotherhood is social service. The altruism is expressed through social service and this active help to the fellow beings occupies a central place in the scheme of the social ethics of the Sikhs. Bhai Gurdas says, "Sacrifice I am unto that person who sacrifices for others. Sacrifice I am unto one who is happy by serving others."¹

Social service ought to be rendered in any or all respects. It may be rendered by providing the material requisite or by rendering physical service or it may be by comforting the spiritual aspect of the other by reading out scriptures to him. It is claimed by Bhai Gurdas that "material, physical and spiritual service, like providing food or giving rest to the bodies of others or reading out the scriptures for their solace, is by far superior to the countless sacrificial fires and performances of ceremonies or mere meditation and common knowledge."² According to him, "The service of others is enjoined by the Gurus."³

Service, according to Guru Gobind Singh, ought to be more of the oppressed and the needy so that they may be uplifted and brought on the same equal level. He says, "True service is the service of these (Common) people; I am not

¹Bhai Gurdas, Var, Stanza 5, Var 12.
²Ibid., Stanza 19, Var 14 ("Giana dhaya lakh jog sabad suhavani ... ").
³Ibid., Stanza 17, Var 14.
inclined to serve others of higher castes; charity will bear fruit, in this and the next world if given to such worthy people as these."\(^1\)

**Social service essentially related with mystic contemplation**

Guru Nanak is of the view that one of the most important effects of devotion and contemplation lies in the attitude of the person towards social service. He says, "When one dwelleth on the (Gurudwara) word, one's mind floweth out to serve the others and one practiseth contemplation and self-control by overcoming ego."\(^2\)

In a similar spirit Guru Arjan Dev places the service of creation immediately prior to the loving prayer. The favourite idiom he uses is 'servant of the servants'. (Seva kario 'das dasan ke' anek bhant tis kario\(^3\)). The direction is clear and unequivocal. A person who has not fulfilled his social loyalties and moral obligations involved in social service is far removed from any spiritual realization. It is one thing he cannot do without. The prayer is to be preceded by the discharge of social obligations in terms of help of the others.

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Concrete form of this tenet

The tenet of social service was given a concrete form and the Gurdwaras (Sikh churches) are required to be the social service centres apart from their role of imparting spiritual instruction. Hospitality and education are to be the watch words. The gurdwara buildings now in many cases house literacy classes as well as provide the necessities of life to the needy. Sikhism, thus, closely resembles the general missionary spirit of Christianity.

In order to mobilise the resources for meeting this obligation 'daswandh' (one tenth of one's income) is required to be the voluntary contribution by the Sikhs for the organised help. It is somewhat on the line of 'zakat' in Islam.

The daswandh serves the dual purpose of organising help for the needy as well as providing the opportunity to the members to participate in the organised social service and thus weld them together in closer ties. It is a somewhat similar approach to that generally adopted by Christianity and is specially exhibited in the altruistic activities of the Mennonite life where "the conscious cultivation of a disciplined brotherhood way of life rooted in a Biblical ethic has contributed most effectively to this end." ¹

In Sikhism, the code compiled by the central body of the Sikhs (S.G.P.C.) (see chapter 5, supra) directs that "the service is an important ingredient of Sikhism. In order to initiate and introduce the person to it provision on a small scale has been made in Sikh Gurdisaras. Its simpler forms in this connection are: upkeep (cleaning, etc.) of the Gurdisara, service of the congregation with water, etc., service in the community kitchen (langar), dusting the footwear of the congregation, etc.

Here it may be interesting to point out that a sect named 'seva pathis' has grown from among the Sikhs by almost exclusive emphasis on this moral tenet of the Sikh ethics. Seva Das, the author of the book of the seva pathis sect, says that "one ought to serve all persons" ("sarbat jiva ka dasta bhav laivna") because the "sants",

1Sikh Rahit Maryada (S.G.P.C). (We have referred to it in Chapter 5, supra).

2The sect of 'seva pathis' (social workers) traces its origin from Bhai Kanan, a Sikh contemporary of the ninth and the tenth Gurus. He is said to have served water to wounded soldiers, both the Sikhs as well as those of the opposing army. When some one complained to the Guru against it he reported to have replied that he was doing so in the true spirit of Sikhism, which requires not to distinguish between friend and foe. He was approved and encouraged by the tenth Guru who is believed to have given 'ointment' to Bhai Kanahla for application to the wounded soldiers without any discrimination of friendly and opposing armies. This episode is a subject of wide reference and is quoted very frequently in Sikhism as a model for conduct.
the holy persons or teachers, are happy when the disciple serves humanity. When the person or disciple serves only the Guru (teacher) and remains indifferent to others he would not be regarded as the lover of God but would be a selfish person. Seva Das explains further that "one who is a lover of God, ought to take to God's attributes. And as God is kind to every one and serves all, neglects none, a person's union with God would only mature when he serves all alike," just as God does so.

In Sikhism the Provider (Dharm) is an oft repeated attribute of God. Dan (help to others) is considered to be an important character of the self through which it is dyeing itself in the colours of the Absolute. Benevolence is generally described to be the most required virtue in the present age. The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, in the second part of Gian Prabodh Granth, in an answer to Jivatma, explains that the practical philosophy of the world is four fold, namely, raj dharma, dan dharma, bhog dharma and moksha dharma. This inclusion of benevolence (dan dharma) as one of the four aspects of practical philosophy brings out its importance in the Sikh ethics.

The spirit underlying the service of others is also to overcome the discriminatory attitudes which characterise

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1Seva Das, Asawarian (Dera Ismail Khan: Devidas Bhagwandas), p. 98.

the state of bondage. Before the distinction between the self and the Absolute is completely overcome the consciousness of the discriminatory distinction between the oneself and the other selves would have to be overcome. The service of the others is a substantial contribution towards such an Ideal. Attainment of the spiritual integration presupposes social integration, according to the Sikh ethics. And the social response of the person is to be maintained, though with a greater underlying affection and sense of mutual relationship, even after the spiritual integration.

Service of the Guru

In Sikhism, we find that great importance is attached to the service of the Guru. Thus is the Adi Granth this theme occurs again and again.

The service of the guru is said to yield spiritual realization.¹ A pointer in similar direction is given by the third Guru also.² Now the service of the guru may be inspired from a sense of gratitude because it is with his teachings that all doubts of the mind are overcome and way is cleared for the attainment of the Ideal.³

A question may be asked as to who this Guru is whose service has been stressed so very often in Sikhism. It may be pointed out here that no particular living Guru is

²Ibid., Dhanasri M. 3 (3-3), p. 664.
Guru's Sabad (Guru's word) is the soul of the Guru and the holy congregation is the body of the Guru. Whose service then can be called the service of the Guru? Whose indeed if not of the congregation which is the body of the Guru? Thus the service of the Guru is in fact the service of humanity.

**Service of God**

One may also notice great stress laid on the service of God or the Divine.\(^1\) Again we may ask as to whose service it is which may be called the service of God. The answer is given by Guru Arjan Dev in unequivocal terms. He says, "God is intertwined with the servant like the warp and woof. He sustaineth his servants, and gives them peace. I bring water for his servants, fan them and grind their corn, for this also is the service of God."\(^2\) In this telling passage, the Guru hardly leaves any doubt as to whose service may be taken to mean the service of God. It is, as we have seen in the case of the service of the Guru, the service of humanity in whom God is reflected. In Existentialist ethics we may see that, like Gabriel Marcel, Jaspers also affirms that "the love of one's fellow men corresponds with the approach to Transcendence (God) itself; and further that "perfection in human existence is measured by the accessibility of man

\(^1\)Ibid., (3-4), p. 222. See also (1-3-11), p. 225 and (1-13), p. 110.

to God and to his fellow men."¹

The Guru says in yet another place that we ought not to make distinction between the so-called good or bad person on the basis of personal prejudice or nearness to one's self for the purposes of rendering service. Any such distinction is indicative of ourselves still being torn by duality (thine). The Guru says that when one has the intuition of the Reality he may see One alone, all over, and then all duality would disappear.²

The same requisite of overcoming ego for the approval of one's service is stressed by Guru Amardass³ which is said to please God.⁴

**General characteristics of service**

It is held by the Gurus that service, if it is to be worthwhile, ought to be without any consideration of reward. In case any reward is solicited for the rendition of the service it can only be termed a bargain. It is declared by Guru Arjan Dev, "He who serves without desire for rewards, O he alone attaineth to the God."⁵

At another place Guru Arjan Dev explains that "we get eternal bliss through the service of God and merge in the

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²Adi Granth, Suhi M.3 (9-2-4-9). p. 757.
³Ibid., Shaloka M.3, p. 1247.
⁴Ibid., (2-27), M.3, p. 1247.
⁵Ibid., Gauri Sukhmani M.5 (2-18), p. 286.
peace of poise ("seva te sada sukh paya gurmukh sehaj samaia"). A difficulty may seem to arise here, that, while the service is required to be 'nehkam' (without desire for reward), as in Bhagavadgita, still a reward seems to be promised. A person while serving others may look forward to it. It may be submitted here that the Gurus wanted the person not to perform social service only for the achievement of an objective as in that case it would be seen to have hypothetical value and would not be valid for those who do not want to obtain any reward. Desire for reward here may be taken to mean the desire for it outside and beyond the act of service. It may be argued that as the spiritual is not completely away and different from the persons the act of service to fellow beings is in itself the act of realization of the spiritual without involving any desire for the external reward. The external reward to which the Gurus seem to refer, and which they seek to forbid, ought to be understood as social approbation and mundane gains.

The second important characteristics of the service, as envisaged in Sikhism, is that it ought to be self-imposed and voluntary. An act of social service done under force—social or otherwise—or grudgingly is not of much ethical significance. The Guru says that "service done under compulsion has neither any equality nor is it of much help to any

1Ibid., Gauri Sukhmani M. 5 (2-18), p. 286.
one. An act of service done happily can only be called worthwhile. ("Badhi chatti jo bhare na gun na upkar, sain khusi swaria Nanak karaj saro").

Should a person cease to serve others after he has realised the ideal? Is service done merely for the sake of attaining the goal? Could there be a stage when it may be renounced? The answer to all these questions in Sikhism is that social service ought not to be renounced at any stage, before or after the realization of the ideal. Bhai Gurdas says, "Gursikh once seized by the thought of social service continues it till end of life."

Seva Das, the author of *Asa Warisan*, points out that one ought to keep on serving always. This is a reminder that the social participation and response ought to continue throughout the life-time of the person. Self-realization or illumination does not mark an end to the social service. The above author quotes a couplet of Kabir in support of his argument. The couplet means that one ought to serve till the Creator is there, that is, till there is the world and existence. Just as the Creator is not exhausted in providing for others, similarly, one ought not to tire of serving.

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6.14: Concluding remarks

Thus we see that in the Sikh ethics there is a great emphasis on the Way of Martha as in Christianity. There is the need for being encumbered about much serving. However, it is harmonised and synthesised with the exalted Way of Mary also, who had found one thing needful and 'they have choosen that good part which shall not be taken away from them'. It synthesises the two to demonstrate that one does not preclude the other.

What about the status of men in society and morals? Ought we to recognise any inequality among men in their interpersonal relationships or relation with God? Here it may be submitted that, as we have seen in the preceding examination, the prominent characteristic of the social ethics of the Sikhs which has appeared in bold relief is in terms of universalism and equality, as expressed in practical social institutions. This remarkably resembles St. Paul's declaration, "There is no place for Jew or Greek, there is no place for slave or free man, there is no place for male or female, for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus."¹

In a similar vein, Guru Nanak proclaims "Every one is high, not one seems low to me; For the Potter hath made all vessels; From His light is the light of the three worlds."² There is then no moral truth in the principle of inequality.

¹Bible, Gal. iii, 28.
²Adi Granth, Sri Rag M. 1 (6-14), p. 62.
Here we may refer to an interesting study in interindividual and intergroup solidarity at Harvard University in America in 1950-51. While drawing conclusions from the discussion of the precipitation of friendship and enmity it is remarked by Pitirim A. Sorokin, "Indeed, the very essence of a friendship and loving relationship seems to consist of kindness and understanding between individuals." ¹

It is this truth, in terms of kindness and understanding, which appears to have been realized by the Gurus in Sikhism in their uncompromising emphasis on altruism and service. This brotherhood should not be a pure sentimentality but ought to be realized in action.

The ideal of social ethics of the Sikhs, therefore, is—universal brotherhood—which includes equality and altruism—as expressed in the attitude as well as the conduct of the person. Every Sikh is required to work and pray for this universal brotherhood by praying for and seeking the good of all "sarbat da bhalla".