CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, define a Sikh, but do not include the term ‘Sikhism’. However, various interpretations of this religion are found on the web. Sikhism is defined as “a belief system which blends Hindu traditions with Islamic monotheistic traditions, based in India and Pakistan.”\(^1\) According to the India and Pakistan Mission Study Guide, “founded in the fifteenth century by Guru Nanak, Sikhism believes in one God and rejects idol worship and caste. Guru Nanak started free community kitchens where his followers could eat together, regardless of their caste affiliations. In the Sikh concept of God, the sovereign God makes his will known to human beings, even though he does not appear in person. Though Karma, the law of the consequence of human actions, is at work, one can align oneself with God's Will and with God's help can attain salvation. Worshipping the True Name or God is the quest of the religion. The Golden Temple in Amritsar is the holiest shrine of Sikhism.”\(^2\) As per the Word Net Search, “Sikhism consists of the doctrines of a monotheistic religion founded in Northern India in the sixteenth century by Guru Nanak, thus combining elements of Hinduism and Islam.”\(^3\)

Khushwant Singh has expressed his view of Sikhism and Sikh history in these words, “The story of the Sikhs is the story of the rise, fulfillment and collapse of Punjabi nationalism. It begins in the later part of the 15th century with Guru Nanak initiating a religious movement emphasizing what is common between Hinduism and Islam and preaching the unity of these two faiths practised in the Punjab. By the beginning of the 17th century, the movement crystallized in the formation of a third religious community consisting of the disciples or Sikhas of Nanak and the succeeding teachers or Gurus.”\(^4\) Many more interesting interpretations of ‘Sikhism’ are found which have been quoted here. Sikhism founded on the teachings of Guru Nanak and nine successive Gurus in

\(^1\) regentsprep.org/Regents/global/vocab/topic.cfm.
\(^2\) new.qbqm-umc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/.
\(^3\) wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn.
fifteenth century Northern India, is the fifth largest religion in the world.\(^5\) This system of religious philosophy and expression has been traditionally known as the Gurmat (literally the Counsel of the Gurus) or the Sikh Dharma.\(^6\)

It may be noted that the word ‘Sikh’ etymologically meaning “learner” or “disciple” is not the name of a race or nationality or caste, but a term signifying the follower of a religion. The Sikh religion differs, as regards the authenticity of its dogmas, from most other great theological systems. The Sikh Gurus employed the vehicle of verse.\(^7\)

The principal belief of Sikhism is faith in Waheguru—represented using the sacred symbol of Ek Omkar, the one universal God. Sikhism advocates the pursuit of salvation through disciplined, personal meditation on the Name and message of God. A key distinctive feature of Sikhism is a non-anthropomorphic concept of God, to the extent that one can interpret God as the Universe itself. The followers of Sikhism are ordained to follow the teachings of the ten Sikh Gurus, or enlightened leaders, as well as the holy scripture entitled the Gurū Granth Sāhib, which includes selected works of many devotees from diverse socio-economic and religious backgrounds. The text was decreed by Gobind Singh, the tenth guru, as the final Guru of the Khalsa Panth. Sikhism's traditions and teachings are distinctively associated with the history, society and culture of the Punjab. Adherents of Sikhism are known as Sikhs (students or disciples) and number over 25 million across the world. Most Sikhs live in the state of Punjab in India and, prior to the country's partition, millions of Sikhs lived in what is now known as the Punjab province of Pakistan.\(^8\) The Sikhs, a small and well-knit community are a unique people in the religious civilization of the world. Practical and progressive in their outlook, they are deeply attached to their faith. Religious belief is their living impulse and the mainspring of their national character and history.\(^9\)

\(^5\) Adherents.com, Religions by Adherents.
The Sikh religion has been acclaimed as the faith of the new age. It is truly the answer to the problems of the modern man.\textsuperscript{10} It is basically a religion of action and human freedom.\textsuperscript{11} The meaning of ‘Religion’ itself has been very well put forth by Gurnam kaur, in her work, \textit{The Sikh Perspective of Human Values (1998)}, wherein she writes that Religion is the basic commitment of man to God. The main concern of religion is to show him the way to reach His reality. It is concerned with the soul of man. Religion seeks to enlighten man about the real meaning of His existence. Thus, it is the response of the whole person, an acceptance and commitment to whatever he takes to be of ultimate value in existence.\textsuperscript{12} The author’s perspective of religion goes a long way in formulating our understanding of Sikhism.

Similarly, Rajkumari Shanker, in her article, “Sikhism and Women”, quotes W.C. Smith to point out that “Sikhism is the evolved product of subsequent centuries, a complex system of beliefs and practices. Nanak had preached a vision, the organizations and institutions came later.”\textsuperscript{13} She further elaborates, a monotheistic tradition Sikhism believes that God can be known only through personal experience of mystical union. Repudiating ritualism, the Sikhs aspire to realize the experience of God through Bhakti (devotion) under the guidance of a Guru. They reject the Hindu caste system and the religious authority of the Brahmins. The Sikhs are disciples of their ten Gurus (teachers) beginning with Guru Nanak (1469-1539) and ending with Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708). Guru Nanak thus founded a new religious community or Panth within the larger Hindu fold.

Now, Sikhism can, with the fullest justification, claim to possess the gospels of its founders in their original purity. The glory of Sikh religion is its universality, which cannot brook sectarianism or narrow loyalties in any shape or form. It was intended by its founders to become the heritage, not of any particular group of people, but of the whole

\textsuperscript{11} Source – Wikipedia, (Internet Website).
mankind.\textsuperscript{14} The advent of Sikh religion represents a well-mark and decisive development in the evolution of Indian religious consciousness.\textsuperscript{15} Khushwant Singh, in his inevitable style, gives a far appropriate direction to the understanding of Sikhism. In his view, “every new religious movement is born out of and shaped by existing faiths, and like offspring bears likeness to them. Sikhism was born out of a wedlock between Hinduism and Islam after they had known each other for a period of nearly nine hundred years. But once it had taken birth, it began to develop a personality of its own and in due course grew into a faith which had some semblance to Hinduism, some to Islam, and yet had features which bore no resemblance to either.”\textsuperscript{16}

According to A.C.Bannerjee, ‘Sikhism is not primarily a philosophical system. Guru Nanak, it has been said, ‘separated pedantic philosophy from religion’ and treated it as ‘less a matter of intellect than of spirit’. This does not mean, of course, that Sikhism has no philosophy or that the intellect can be entirely eliminated in understanding Guru Nanak’s teachings. The \textit{Vars} of Bhai Gurdas represent the rational and philosophical trend in the interpretation of Sikhism. Guru Nanak’s compositions tell us about God, His nature and attributes, and His relation with man and the universe. Instead of drawing authority and inspiration from any revealed scripture he depends upon his own mystical experience to explain the nature of Truth and the ‘True way’ which leads to salvation. The manner of his exposition – simple, lucid, often related to man’s daily experience – and the poetic flavour of his language appeal primarily to the heart and leave little scope for learned controversies on abstract issues in which scholars, Hindu and Muslim, found special pleasure in his days. He wanted to transfer religion from centres of scholasticism to common men’s homes; he wanted men to love God without taking the aid of barren metaphysics.\textsuperscript{17}

Taimur’s invasion in A.D. 1398 was the end of organized government in Northern India. Local governors openly rebelled against the Sultan of Delhi and declared

\textsuperscript{14}Narain Singh, \textit{Our Heritage}, Amritsar, p.1.
\textsuperscript{17}Anil Chandra Bannerjee, \textit{Guru Nanak and His Times}, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1971, pp.149-150. See also; Inderpal Sekhon, \textit{Bengali Historiography on Guru Nanak and His Mission}, 2007, M.Phil. Dissertaion, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2007.
themselves as independent monarchs. Thus, the work done by the Sufis who had preached tolerance towards Hinduism and of the Hindu Bhaktas who had advocated a sympathetic understanding of Islam was undone. Political turmoil affected the religious practices of the masses. Hence in Khushwant Singh’s view, “the birth of Sikhism cannot be studied in isolation as it was a result of the rapidly changing religious and political climate of the fifteenth century Punjab”.\(^{18}\)

Guru Nanak emerged on the scene amongst such political chaos and anarchy, thereby describing the turbulent times through the medium of his writings. The Sikh Church was further built and strengthened by his successors, from Guru Angad Dev to Guru Gobind Singh. Endorsing this view, Sulakhan Singh writes, “Sikhism as a new dispensation was born out of Guru Nanak’s intense religious experience as well as his sharp response to his contemporary socio-religious and political milieu”.\(^{19}\)

He further states that under the successors of Guru Nanak, the Sikh institutions further grew in terms of number and influence. Guru Angad Dev not only modified the Gurmukhi script but also made it more popular among his contemporaries. Thus, it acted as an effective instrument to the making of the Sikh Scripture. Guru Amar Das gave further impetus to the growth of the Sikh Panth by adding the institution of *manjis* (bedstead) i.e. the centers primarily meant for missionary work. The holder of the *manji* was called the *manjidar*. Moreover with a view to the growing needs of the Sikh community Guru Ram Das added a new dimension to the institutional developments of the Sikh faith by appointing the *masands* (from Persian word *masnad*) meaning an authorized or commissioned missionary of the Gurus who now were directed to collect offerings or the *Daswandh* (the tithe or one tenth of the earnings) from the Sikhs and to deposit the collected amount to the Guru’s treasury. As with the passage of time, the *masands* grew corrupt, hence the institution was ultimately abolished by Guru Gobind Singh.\(^{20}\)

The above narrative is very lucidly summed up by Sulakhan Singh, wherein he says that the institution of the Order of the Khalsa (the pure ones having direct relation with the Guru) founded by Guru Gobind Singh on the Baisakhi day of 1699 C.E. was


primarily meant to serve the cause of the righteous against injustice or favour the cause of the good against evil as envisaged by the Guru himself. The undying spirit of the Khalsa and its symbolism, undoubtedly, has played a very crucial role as a great catalyst or the driving force in the history of the Sikhs and their religion even at times of very odd eventualities. The force that even now works behind all this and several other institutions of the Sikhs is the noble spirit and the message of the Guru Granth Sahib.\(^\text{21}\)

The Sikh community was born in the fifteenth century in northern India with the birth of Guru Nanak, a Hindu of the Khatri caste, writes Doris R. Jakobsh.\(^\text{22}\) Ever since the sixteenth century, the Sikhs have evolved their faith with distinct features which occupies unique place in the socio-religious life of the people in North India especially the Punjab.\(^\text{23}\) Sikhs are known for their wanderlust, for their love of adventure and their land hunger. They are a small community numerically but, with their ready mobility, they make good international showing. In all places, they are immediately recognizable by their turbans and beards. These are signs of their religious faith – an essential part of their way of life. Wherever they might be, they try to adhere to their own distinctive manner. But, what is especially interesting is the importance they attach to their religious beliefs, customs and form. Their religion is for them the strongest cementing force. It defines their character as well as their individuality. Sikh identity, is in its profoundest meaning, religious.\(^\text{24}\) Similarly, Daljeet Singh upholds that Sikhism is a revelatory religion. Its bedrock is the revelation that came to Guru Nanak and his nine successors, who conveyed it in simple and melodious verses to the suffering humanity. The word of the Gurus became the bond between the Gurus and their Sikhs (Shish) or disciples.\(^\text{25}\) Elsewhere he writes that, Sikhism means two things, firstly that there is a level of Reality higher than the empirical Reality we experience with our normal senses. Secondly, that this higher Reality reveals itself to man and enlightens him. In other words, God is both transcendent and immanent and man can be in tune with his immanence. Therefore, in

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order to understand Sikhism, these fundamentals have to be kept in mind. In Sikhism, religion means living a life of love.  

The essence of Sikhism is in its belief that the world is real, God is interested in the world, practice of virtues is the way to God, man’s spiritual assessment depends on his deeds in this world, acceptance of householder’s responsibility, equality of women, brotherhood of man, work is a part of man’s religious duty, sharing one’s income with one’s fellow beings, participation in all walks of life and use of force in aiding righteous causes is sanctioned.

Sikhism, is essentially, and more than anything else, the religion of the Numenon and throughout the voluminous Sikh scripture, consisting of approximately 30,000 hymns, there are not many hymns or pages of this book, when it is not asserted through repeated statements, literary similes and allusions, that the essence of true religious theory and practice, is the Name. Sikhism is definitely not a history-grounded religion, i.e. the truth, the validity of Sikhism does not depend upon any event that has occurred in history, as is the case with other religions, for example–Islam, Christianity and Judaism. It is a religion of the way, i.e. something that must be lived and experienced rather than something which may be intellectually grasped and declared. True, there can be no practice without the dogma. Sikhism, therefore, has its doctrines, its dogmatic stand, its view of reality, its view of the nature of man, and their inter-relationship, but it lays primary stress on the practice, the discipline, “the way which leads to” the cessation of suffering as the Buddha formulated it.

Thus, the religion Sikhism, teaches a religious discipline, which is in essence a practice which includes the technique of bhakti, the supreme training of the emotions in the service of one supreme end, and a socio-politically active life, motivated not by the little ego of the individual but by an individual self, which is yoked to the universal self.

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1. SIKHISM AND ITS TENETS:

The Guru Granth Sahib contains the essence of the entire philosophy of the Sikh way of life. It is a commentary on the prevalent contemporary religious understanding. It aptly reflects the then religious philosophies.\(^{31}\) The holy scripture of the Sikhs, guides them and all humanity to live harmoniously and peacefully with one another.

Available Sikh Literature in its varied forms provides us with invaluable evidence on the religious beliefs and practices of the Sikhs. The backbone of Sikh philosophy is the Guru Granth Sahib, followed closely by the Janamsakhis and the Varan Bhai Gurdas. The very foundations of the Sikh church lie in the teachings of Guru Nanak, who was a great visionary of his times. Guru Nanak’s writings are commentaries on the contemporary society of his times. The origins of Sikhism lie in the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors. His life and teachings challenged many of the religious beliefs and practices of his time.\(^{32}\)

Sikhism traces its beginnings to Guru Nanak, who was born in 1469. With the life of Guru Nanak the account of the Sikh faith begins, all Sikhs acknowledging him as their founder. Although his life is sketchy his teachings can be positively known. Elaborating further McLeod writes, “Nanak emerged as a religious teacher belonging to the Sant tradition of Northern India.”\(^{33}\) In the message he delivered, lay the seed of a vital thought stream, which moulded a new community of men. Attempts have been made to split Guru Nanak’s doctrine into various strands and to trace their origin to precedent schools of thought. In order to understand Guru Nanak fully, one has to look at the totality of his tenets and at what impact it made on history. In this perspective, Guru Nanak emerged historically the founder of the Sikh faith. Guru Nanak’s ideals signaled a new departure in contemporary religious ethos. Sikh tradition in continuum bears witness to the divine quality of Guru Nanak’s intuition. To a society torn by conflict, he brought a vision of common humanity – a vision which transcended all barriers of creed and caste, race and country. He reminded men of their essential oneness.\(^{34}\) The Sant tradition was a

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part of the Bhakti movement which arose against the religious orthodoxy of the time. In this regard, Guru Nanak’s teachings are purely circumstantial, a response to the foolish, meaningless practices, blind-faith, customs and increasing hold of the Brahmins over people’s lives adding further to their woes. Their emphasis was more on the concept of one God. McLeod states, “religion for the Sants was wholly inward and inwardly they meditated on God.”

Guru Nanak laid the foundations of a new religion and started a new pattern of living. Guru Nanak disapproved of the worship of idols because people tended to look upon them as God instead of symbolic representations. Guru Nanak believed that God was Sat (both truth and reality), as opposed to Asat (falsehood) and Mithya (illusion). A good Sikh therefore must not only believe that God is the only One, Omnipotent, and Omniscient Reality, but also conduct himself in such a way towards his fellow beings that he does not harm them; for hurtful conduct like lying, cheating, fornication, trespass on a person or on his property, does not conform to the truth that is God. This principle is stated categorically by Guru Nanak in the opening lines of his most celebrated morning prayer, the Japji, and in the Mul Mantra or the basic belief of Sikhism. Guru Nanak believed that the power that was God could not be defined because God was nirankar (formless). All of the descriptions of God were consequently admissions of an inability to define him. Despite the difficulty of definition, Guru Nanak used a variety of names for God. He was the Father (Pita) of all mankind; He was the Lover (Pritam) and Master (Khasam) of his devotee; He was also the Great Giver (Data). The attribute he usually ascribed to Him was that of the True Creator (Sat Kartar) or the True Name (Sat Nam).

Sikhism believes in equality of all humans and rejection of the caste system. Living one’s life, while carrying out the responsibilities of worldly life, and not withdrawing from it, is encouraged. For Sikhs, initiation into the Khalsa strengthens their identity and also signifies the Sikh teaching of equality. The Sikhs are required to follow the teachings of their Guru and serve him, with weapons if necessary. W.H. McLeod emphasizes that his analysis, “concerns the theology of Guru Nanak and not the theology of Sikhism as the two are largely but not completely coterminous and at one important

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point there is divergence. For modern Sikhism the scripture exists as a channel of communication between God and man, but obviously this could be no part of Guru Nanak’s theology. It must be understood, however, that this doctrine, its significance notwithstanding, is no more than a supplement to the teaching imparted by Guru Nanak. The theology of Guru Nanak remains the substance of Sikh belief.”

i) THE NATURE OF GOD:

_Ek Oankar Sati namu Karata purukhu nirabhau niravairu akal murati ajuni saibhan gur prasadi._

“God being the same for everyone, but only his destiny is awakened on whom is His grace and His grace comes to all who seek it through service, humility, by dying to themselves, and yet living so that God’s purpose in creating life be fulfilled.”

The starting point of one’s study of Guru Nanak’s religion must be his concept of God which is expressed in brief and apparently simple words of the Mul Mantra.

McLeod quotes Principal Jodh Singh in illustrating the Mul Mantra, “The being is One. He is eternal. He is immanent in all things and the sustainer of all things. He is the Creator of all things. He is immanent in His creation. He is without fear and without enmity. This being is not subject to time. He is beyond birth and death. He is himself responsible for His own manifestation. (He is known) by the Guru’s grace.”

The Mul Mantra greatly elucidates the concept of the Unity of God, which is the very foundation of the Sikh tradition.

Undoubtedly the credit of giving a new approach in the form of a realistic and independent thought process, goes to Guru Nanak, who through the powerful medium of his sermons continues to lead us from darkness towards light till today. Guru Nanak’s God was one. He was a strict monotheist, not willing to accept the theories of re-incarnation which were largely prevalent in the society of his time. One finds his teachings being based on the spiritual concept of God. Therefore it became obligatory for a true Sikh to believe in

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38 _Loc.cit_.
the Oneness of God without any doubt, consider him Omnipotent and Omniscient and thereby follow the path of truthful and rightful living. He called the supreme being simply Ikk (One), without a second, who is eternal, infinite and all-pervasive. He is not limited by time. He is perennially self-existent and is the source of love and grace. He is both Nirguna and Saguna i.e. He is with attributes as well as without attributes. Yet, he is formless. He is never incarnated, nor can any image retain him.\textsuperscript{42} Nanak further put forth the Ideal of Man’s life as purity among the world’s impurities.

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion. In Sikhism, God—termed Vāhigurū—is formless, eternal, and indescribable: nirankār, akāl, and alakh. The beginning of the first composition of Sikh scripture is the figure "1"—signifying the Oneness and universality of God. It states that God is omnipresent and infinite, and is signified by the term Ek Omkar. The Sikhs believe that prior to creation, all that existed was God and his Hukam (Will or Order). When God willed, the entire cosmos was created. From these beginnings, God nurtured "enticement and attachment" to Māyā, or the human perception of reality.\textsuperscript{43}

While a full understanding of God is beyond human beings, Nanak described God as not wholly unknowable. God is omnipresent (Sarav Viāpak) in all creation and visible everywhere to the spiritually awakened. Guru Nanak stressed that God must be seen from "the inward eye", or the "heart", of a human being: devotees must meditate to progress towards enlightenment.\textsuperscript{44} The idea that God is transcendent and also immanent places Guru Nanak’s monotheism in a category different from monotheism in Islam. Guru Nanak’s God is indeed a God of Grace.\textsuperscript{45}

\textbf{ii) UNCONDITIONAL SUBMISSION TO THE DIVINE WILL}:

The door to salvation is opened by God’s Grace, Nazar, kirpa, Parsad, Daya. Those who meditate on Him with single mind receive His Grace. What He gives is given in accordance with His Will. Man is initially dependent upon Divine pleasure for spiritual regeneration.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{42} Harbans Singh, \emph{Berkeley Lectures on Sikhism}, New Delhi, 1983, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{43} new.qbpm-unc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/
\textsuperscript{44} Loc.cit.
\textsuperscript{45} Anil Chandra Bannerjee, \emph{Op.cit}, pp. 155-156.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, p. 156.
Guru Nanak did not approve of ascetic isolation or torturing of the flesh as a step to enlightenment. He, in fact, rejected all outward forms of piety. In his view, pilgrimages, fasts and ascetic practices were of no avail. The first step towards enlightenment is the apprehension that the Transcendent is the only Ultimate Truth. This apprehension must be accompanied by intense love of God, utter self-surrender to Him and complete faith in His Hukam or Will. Thus, one realizes the reality and frees oneself from the bondage of ego.  

God is both the Creator and the Sustainer according to Guru Nanak. God does not merely create. Having brought the world into being, he watches over it and cares for it. For Nanak, God is a participant in the life of the universe which He has established, watching, directing and upholding. God, the One, is Brahma, Visnu and Siva. The Creator and Sustainer is also the Destroyer and the Recreator. God is both Sovereign and Eternal. Although the World is unstable and impermanent, God himself is not.

Guru Nanak also refers to God as Ajuni, One who is unborn and non-incarnated. The Japji, endorses this view by stressing that God is beyond death and transmigration. God is Formless and Ineffable, i.e., He can never be incarnated and therefore cannot be present in an idol. He is Immanent, meaning He is beyond human perception and understanding. McLeod thus sums up, ‘God the omnipotent and omniscient is also God the omnipresent’.

According to Sikhism, the goal of life for a person is to progress on a spiritual scale from Manmukh or "self-centered", to Gurmukh, or "God-centered". In the view of McLeod, the person who fails to discern the nature of the divine order is a Manmukh. His loyalty is to himself, to the wayward impulses of his own man instead of to the voice of the Guru. In contrast to this pattern, is that of the Gurmukh. The Gurmukh hears and obeys the Guru's word; the Manmukh ignores it. Offered truth, freedom and life, he chooses instead falsehood, bondage, and death, for such is the fate of the man who has

49 Loc.cit.
51 Ibid, p. 171.
52 Ibid, p. 172.
not purged Haumai from his Man. Gurmukh implies the qualities of humility, selfless service, adhering to the teachings of Guru and not being a recluse.

iii) ELIMINATING THE HAUMAI / EGO:

The Sikh faith admits man’s material happiness to be as important as his spiritual liberation. Guru Nanak attaches greatest importance to moral conduct, including perseverance, chastity, wisdom, self-control, patience and obedience to the Will of God. McLeod substantiates, in unregenerate man, the dominant impulse is that of Haumai, which determines the pattern of his life. Instead of leading a man to release and salvation, his Haumai will invariably stimulate affections which can only bind him more firmly to the wheel of transmigration. Although the usual translation of Haumai is ‘Ego’, its other possible translations are ‘Self’ and ‘Self-centredness’.

Guru Nanak’s teachings are founded not on a final destination of heaven or hell, but on a spiritual union with God which results in salvation.

The goal of man, as prescribed by Guru Nanak is union with God. This union is to be achieved stage by stage. Nanak formulates five stages of spiritual development; each of them is called a Khand or ‘realm’. The first called, Dharam Khand, represents the realm of Dharam or Law. Here the emphasis is on the performance of Duty. Men are judged by thought and deed; the Court of God is adorned by the elect. The second is called Gian Khand or the realm of Knowledge. Acquisition of Knowledge weakens self-centredness. The third stage, called Saram Khand, is differently translated; as the realm of Happiness or Spiritual Endeavour or Surrender. Here beauty is resplendent. The fourth stage is called Karam Khand, or the realm of Action, where ‘effort is supreme’ and ‘nothing else prevails’. Sach Khand, or the realm of Truth, is the fifth and final stage. There dwells the Formless One Who watches His Creation.

The chief obstacles to the attainment of salvation are social conflicts and an attachment to worldly pursuits, which commit men and women to an endless cycle of

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57 new.qbgm-unc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/
60 new.qbgm-unc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/
birth, a concept known as **Reincarnation**. **Maya**, defined as Illusion or "Unreality", is one of the core deviations from the pursuit of God and Salvation: people are distracted from devotion by worldly attractions which give only illusive satisfaction. However, Guru Nanak emphasised **Maya** as not a reference to the unreality of the world, but of its values. In Sikhism, **Maya** implies that the visible world is real but is not permanent. Attachment to this transitory world is the greatest barrier between *Man* and Truth. For him there is a choice, worldly enjoyment or Union with God. One who yields to **Maya** is caught in the cycle of transmigration; his chains are not cut asunder.63

In Sikhism, the influences of ego, anger, greed, attachment and lust—known as the Five Evils—are believed to be particularly pernicious. The fate of people vulnerable to the Five Evils is separation from God, and the situation may be remedied only after intensive and relentless devotion. Guru Nanak described God's revelation—the path to salvation—with terms such as **Naam** (the Divine Name) and **Shabad** (the Divine Word) to emphasise the totality of the revelation. He designated the word *Guru* (meaning Teacher) as the voice of God and the source and guide for Knowledge and Salvation. Salvation can be reached only through rigorous and disciplined devotion to God. Guru Nanak distinctly emphasised the irrelevance of outwardly observations such as rites, pilgrimages or asceticism. He stressed that devotion must take place through the heart, with the spirit and the soul.64

Avtar Singh, in his *Ethics of The Sikhs*, believes that in order to understand the moral standard in Sikhism, we need to understand the problem of morality, envisaged therein. According to Guru Nanak, each person, in his empirical existence occupies himself with a narrow and limited view-point. This narrow view-point, is referred to by Guru Nanak as **Haumai** (I-Am-Ness), a feeling of superior Self-Ego, indicated in a narrow or too limited point of view.65

### iv) REMEMBERING THE DIVINE NAAM:

A key practice to be pursued is **Naam Simran** : remembrance of the divine Name. The verbal repetition of the name of God or a sacred syllable is an established practice in

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62 [new.qbgm-unc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/](new.qbgm-unc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/)
64 [new.qbgm-unc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/](new.qbgm-unc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/)
religious traditions in India, but Guru Nanak's interpretation emphasised inward, personal observance. Guru Nanak's ideal is the total exposure of one's being to the Divine Name and a total conforming to Dharma or the "Divine Order". Guru Nanak described the result of the disciplined application of Naam Simran as a "growing towards and into God" through a gradual process of five stages. The last of these is Sach Khand (The Realm of Truth)—the final union of the spirit with God. For Guru Nanak, the key to liberation lay in the Naam. By meditating on the Naam and all its aspects, the believer would progressively find liberation. By the regular practice of Naam Simran, a person would achieve a final harmony of spirit in which the endless wheel of death and rebirth would be stilled, and the soul would find ultimate peace. This was the message preached by Guru Nanak to all who could hear him. It was one which required no separation from worldly life and which could be followed by any person, regardless of present caste or past deeds. Above all it was wholly internal, a discipline to be followed without any assistance from sacred persons or sacred things. The only requirement was regular meditation. Naam Simran meant the simple repetition of meaningful words, such as Satnam, ‘True is the Name’ or the popular modern name for God, Waheguru. It could involve the singing of hymns glorifying the Naam, or simply could be deep meditation within.

In fact, Sikhism has often been called the Naam Marg or the way of Naam. The basic definition of Naam as contained in Sukhmani and other hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib, has been given by Daljeet Singh in the following way:

(i) Naam sustains all regions and universes, all thought, knowledge and consciousness, in short, it is all-encompassing. Naam emancipates those who accept it in their heart. He, on whom is His Grace, is yoked to Naam, and he reaches the highest state of development.

(ii) Naam is the creator of everything. To be divorced from Naam is death. Naam gives form to everything and through Naam comes all wisdom or light.

(iii)Naam extends to all creation.

(iv)Naam is the ‘Nine Treasures’ or nectar. It permeates the body.

(v) Naam, the immaculate, is unfathomable. How can it be known? Naam is within us.

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66 new.qbmg-unc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/
The doctrine of Naam gives a clear clue to the understanding of Sikh theology and Sikh history. It also vividly explains the ten Gurus attack on the socio-political institutions of their times, their martyrdoms and military preparations and struggle with a view to create new socio-political organizations and institutions. In the words of Guru Nanak himself, ‘those who are dyed in the Naam suffer neither burden nor illusion. Repeating the name of God is extremely profitable; the fearless one is really in one’s heart’. An analysis of the ‘theological’ imagery of Guru Nanak’s Bani indicates that he addressed himself to petty traders, artisans and bond-servants of the moneyed magnates as well.

There is a great stress on Naam-Simran (meditation on the Divine Name of God and the Word), which is considered superior to everything else, including Sewa (Selfless-Service), Charity and Sacrifice. The gospel of Naam is the pivot of Sikh monotheistic theology. The gospel of Naam is considered as the gospel of God-realization and self-perfection through the Joga of Jap, Simran or Naam or constant Oneness with God. In Guru Arjan Dev’s view, Nam-Simran (Naam Japna), which is the spiritual discipline par excellence is the first practical step on the journey that leads to the acme of human development and is one of the fundamental principles of Sikhism.

v) SELFLESS SERVICE TO HUMANITY / KIRAT KARO:

In Guru Nanak’s view, the Ideal of life was to be purity among the world’s impurities. Therefore, Guru Nanak did not approve of ascetic isolation or torturing of the flesh as a step to enlightenment. His ideal was to have the detachment of a yogi while living among one’s fellow beings – Raj Men Jog (to achieve Enlightenment in civic life).

Guru Nanak stressed Kirat Karō: that a Sikh should balance work, worship, and charity, and should defend the rights of all creatures, and in particular, fellow human beings. They are encouraged to have a Chardi Kala, or Optimistic view of life. Sikh teachings also stress the concept of sharing (Vand Chakko,) through the distribution of free food at Sikh gurdwaras (Langar), giving charitable donations, and working for the good of

the community and others (Seva). Guru Nanak also laid special emphasis on Seva or Self–
–abnegating deeds of Service. By humble and devoted service one purified one’s body and mind. This was to serve as the right way of living for a truly religious man.

The Universal characteristics of Guru Nanak’s teachings have been aptly described by Khushwant Singh, wherein he states, “Nanak is still remembered in the Punjab as the King of Holy men, the Guru of the Hindus and the Pir of the Mussalmans.” Guru Nanak was a teacher not of his own wisdom. He preached, what, he said, had been taught by the Lord himself. The Sikh doctrine thereby consists of the affirmation in it of the opposites, the synthesis of the Worldly and the Outworldly, of the Temporal and the Spiritual. Effectual religious devotion was made in it compatible with the ordinary duties of life. W.H. McLeod, refers to Guru Nanak’s beliefs as his theology, for the whole of Guru Nanak’s thought revolves around his understanding of the nature of God. He further elaborates that this theology is not, of course, set out in any systematic form. Guru Nanak’s writings bear witness to his experience of God and the characteristic expression of that experience is the hymn of praise which it engenders.

vi) GURU—THE SPIRITUAL PRECEPTOR OR GUIDE :

Almost all religions of the world believe in the necessity of a Guru. The Sikh Gurus do not proclaim themselves as incarnations of God. In the words of Guru Ramdas, “The Sikh who follows the Gurus teachings will become one with the Guru. No difference will be felt between the Guru and the Sikh.” A Sikh is therefore, expected to have complete faith in the Guru. Again, Guru Nanak does not want the disciple to have blind faith in the Guru. At the same time, one cannot understand the significance of the Guru’s teachings, until one practices them. Guru Nanak attached a lot of significance to the role of a Guru and even Sikhism endorses the doctrine of the Guru. Considerable

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72 //new.qbqm-umc.org/missionstudies/indiapakistan/glossary2/
73 Harbans Singh, Berkeley Lectures on Sikhism, New Delhi, 1983, p. 16.
76 Ibid, p. 4.
78 Ibid, p. 149.
emphasis is laid upon his role as the communicator of Divine Truth. According to Teja Singh, a Guru is a particular personality, a creative and perfect personality who stands as guide and exemplar. It is the Guru who communicates the Sabad to the disciple. It is the Guru through whose instruction the love of the Name is instilled into one’s mind. Without the Guru’s guidance no one can attain release (Mokh, Moksha) or Salvation. This is a familiar theme in Guru Nanak’s hymns. Guru Nanak lays down the qualifications of Guruship: Take him as Guru who shows the path of truth; who tells you of the One of whom nothing is known; who tells you of the divine world’ In Guru Nanak’s view, he (Guru) is a guide and teacher, mediator and intercessor, but not a Divine Master. Elsewhere, he equates the Guru with God. Absolute surrender to the Guru in spirit and unquestioning obedience are to him in practice are the essential duties of every Sikh.

Sirdar Kapur Singh, in his, ‘Sikhism, An Oecumenical Religion’, writes that the meaning of the word ‘Guru’ was taught by Guru Gobind Singh himself, to Bhai Mani Singh, as claimed by him, as “Go meaning inertia, matter, nescience and Ru meaning the principle of light that illumines consciousness. Guru, therefore, means nothing less than the Divine light implicit in every human heart progressively revealed to him through a proper cultivation of his religious intuition.

vi) OTHER SIKH IDEALS AND INSTITUTIONS:

The Bhaktas had only paid lip service to the ideal of a casteless society. Guru Nanak took practical steps to break the vicious hold of caste by starting free community kitchens (Guru Ka Langar) in all centres and persuading his followers, irrespective of their castes, to eat together. Guru Nanak’s writings abound with passages deploring the system and other practices which grew out of caste concepts, particularly the notion held by Brahmins that even the shadow of a lower caste man, on a place where food was being cooked, made it impure.

Nanak thus attached prime significance to inculcation of values, most important of these being patience (Sahaj), performing one’s duty selflessly (Kirat Karo), and the concept of sharing, work, worship and to give away in charity (Vand Chakko). According to Guru Nanak, there is no general rule applicable to everyone; each person should discipline himself according to his physical capacity and temperament. Guru Nanak wanted common men to lead a real spiritual life and combine themselves in a social pattern which will give rise to toleration for the views of others and a general desire to work for the welfare of the whole mankind.\(^8^4\)

The Guru Granth Sahib consists very largely of devotional hymns, arranged on the basis of Ragas (musical modes) further sub-divided into various sub-sections on the basis of authorship. At the beginning is a long series of aphorisms called the Japji, which every Sikh is supposed to know by heart, and it is recited early in the morning daily. This is believed to be the work of Guru Nanak in his old age. Following the Japji is the Asa Di War, which is also mostly a collection of Guru Nanak’s sayings, and which is for additional use in the morning. Then comes the Rahiras, (hymns by Guru Nanak, Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan Dev), which is to be recited in the daily evening service. It is regrettable that many Sikhs do not and cannot now learn and memorize the Guru Granth Sahib which is written in a special dialect called Gurmukhi, with which many are not familiar. Those teachers who find its teaching attractive should remember that it is the fruit of hybridization between Islam and Hinduism, and that through Islam, Guru Nanak and his followers found contact with Hebrew ideas of God, and also with that peculiar blend of Moslem and neo-Platonic piety called Sufism.\(^8^5\) Anyway, one cannot ignore the freshness and originality of the theology of Guru Nanak and his successors.

2. MAIN SIKH HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS :

Tradition and politics have played capriciously with the date and place of Guru Nanak’s birth. He was born in the month of April, that is what modern research has conclusively established at Nankana Sahib, now in Pakistan. Guru Nanak did not plan his renunciation. He had a mission to fulfil, but he did not have to give up the world for the sake of it. He travelled far and wide in pursuit of his mission. From references in his

hymns connected with the various places he visited, the monuments commemorating his visits to those places and the old biographies, one can form a fairly comprehensive idea of his travels which took him to foreign lands such as Arabia, Ceylon and Tibet. During these journeys Guru Nanak visited places of pilgrimage sacred to the Hindus, the Muslims and the Buddhists. Seeing the futility of meaningless customs, rituals and practices being followed in the name of these religions, he made it his mission to bring out the essence and purity of religion, which had become more a matter of superstitious dogma and ritual. True religion, according to him, consisted in love of God and love of man. He made use of music in the propagation of his mission. His simplicity of manner and the universality of his teachings appealed to the hearts of men. A new way of life opened to those who accepted him as their teacher. Repudiation of caste and ritualism was the first distinguishing feature of this new order.\(^{86}\)

Sikhism is rooted in a particular religious experience, piety, and culture and informed by a unique inner revelation of its founder, Guru Nanak (1469–1539). It evolved in response to three main elements. The first of these was the ideology based on religious and cultural innovations of Guru Nanak and his nine successors. The second was the rural base of the Punjabi society. The third significant element was the period of Punjab history. All three elements combined to produce the mutual interaction between ideology and environment in the historical development of Sikhism.\(^{87}\) The foundations of the Sikh faith were laid by Guru Nanak and his teachings. Indeed with the seeds sown by the first Guru, Sikhism was to grow manifold under the vision, far-sightedness and able guidance of the later Gurus.

Guru Nanak was the first popular leader of the Punjab in recorded history. Even when the number of his actual disciples was not perhaps very great, the number of those belonging to other communities who paid homage to the ideal of “there is no Hindu; there is no Mussalman,” was considerable. It was this ideal which gave birth to Punjabi consciousness and to Punjabi nationalism.\(^{88}\)

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J.S. Grewal opines that a rigorous analysis of the compositions of Guru Nanak reveals that there is hardly anything in contemporary politics, society or religion that he finds commendable. For a rational conceptualization of his position, it may be suggested that the entire social order had lost its legitimacy in the eyes of Guru Nanak because it had lost its support from the prevalent religious ideologies; it was neither ‘Hindu’ nor ‘Muslim’. A new religious ideology was needed to become the basis of a new social order. His denunciation of contemporary practices and beliefs is only an inverted statement of his positive ideals. Guru Nanak was thoroughly familiar with the politico-administrative arrangements made by the Afghan rulers, particularly in the Punjab. This familiarity, reflected in the use of metaphors by him. The underlying element in the teachings of Guru Nanak, is egalitarianism. He professes universal equality, the right of spiritual advancement and a true democratic approach to be followed by one and all.

The way of life adopted by the disciples of Guru Nanak was somewhat different from that of the Hindus or the Muslims from whom they had sprung. Since Guru Nanak had emphasized the role of truthful companionship (Sat Sang), his disciples naturally interpreted it as being constituted of those who accepted Guru Nanak as their Guru. The breakaway from the parent communities started in the Guru’s lifetime. It began with a different place and a mode of worship. The Sikh no longer chanted Sanskrit Slokas to stone idols or murmured the Arabic of the Koran while genuflecting towards Mecca; he sang the hymns of Guru Nanak in his own mother-tongue, Punjabi. He ate with his fellow Sikhs at the Guru’s kitchen, which he helped to organize by collecting rations and in which he took turns to serve as a cook or scrubber of utensils. All this resulted in building a community of people who had more in common with each other than with the communities to which they had belonged.  

At the age of fifty-two, Guru Nanak returned from his travels to settle down at kartarpur, on the banks of Ravi, and once again took upon himself the duties of everyday life. He worked on the farm and morning and evening, held congregations and recited the sacred hymns. Kartarpur became a place of pilgrimage for his followers. Here he organized Langar (free community kitchen), for his Sikhs, and also for all those who,  

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forgetting the distinctions of caste, sat down in a row, (Pangat) for a meal. The missionaries appointed by the Guru in different parts of India to propogate his mission, brought timely reports of their work and offerings collected. Kartarpur thus became the centre of the Sikh faith, which was gradually developing the characteristics of an organized church. In 1539, at the age of seventy, Guru Nanak passed away, leaving behind his spiritual successor, Guru Angad Dev, and a large number of followers scattered all over India and in other lands.\footnote{Harbans Singh, \textit{Op.cit}, pp. 22-23.}

With the appointment of one of his followers as his successor by Guru Nanak, the line of prophetic succession continued until the tenth master, Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikh character and organization thus developed under the ten successive leaders, each emphasizing a particular lesson, truly exemplified in his own life, or contributing a new national trait rehearsed under the stress of changing times and environs.\footnote{Ibid, p. 12.}

During the period of the ten Gurus (Preceptors), three key events took place in the evolution of Sikhism. The first was the establishment of the first Sikh community at Kartarpur in west Punjab during the last two decades of Guru Nanak's life. To ensure its survival, Guru Nanak formally appointed a successor before he passed away in 1539. Thus, a lineage was established, and a legitimate succession was maintained intact from the appointment of the second Guru, Guru Angad Dev (1504–1552), to the death of Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the tenth and the last Guru of the Sikhs. The second event was the compilation of the canonical scripture, the \textit{Guru Granth Sahib} in 1604 by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev (1563–1606). It provided a framework for the shaping of the Sikh community. The third was the founding of the institution of the \textit{Khalsa} (pure) by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699, an order of loyal Sikhs bound by common identity and discipline.\footnote{\textit{"http://family.jrank.org/pages/1568/Sikhism-Origins-Development-Sikhism.html"\textgreater} Sikhism - The Origins And Development Of Sikhism</a>\footnote{\textit{Ibid}}

Guru Angad Dev (1539-52) had come to Kartarpur as a seeker. He was then known as Lehna and had spent many years in the worship of Goddess Durga. On one occasion, he heard Bhai Jodha, sing the hymns of Guru Nanak and was so deeply touched that, on his next pilgrimage to the Goddess's temple, he halted at Kartarpur, to meet the

\[92\] Ibid, p. 12.
Guru. This meeting became the turning point of his life. It put an end to all his quest and journeying. He discovered in the Guru’s word, the truth and solace he had been seeking and found joy in offering him, his devoted service. Bhai Lehna, imbibed the spirit of Sikhism and impressed everyone so greatly, by his piety and nobility of character that Guru Nanak chose him as his successor in preference to his own sons. He embraced him and called him, ‘Angad’, i.e. part and parcel of his own being. Thus, “Guru Nanak’s light blended with Guru Angad Dev’s”. Guru Angad Dev carried forward Guru Nanak’s work, and the Sikh movement developed in his time, a more specific character. He popularized the Gurmukhi script, which had been introduced by Guru Nanak and had the latter’s hymns and life-stories written in the same script. This was the beginning of the religious literature of the Sikhs. The institution of Langar established by Guru Nanak, gained importance as an instrument of a far-reaching social revolution.94

Guru Amar Das, was born before day on the 14th of the light half of Baisakh, in the Sambat year 1536 (1479 A.D.). He lived partly by agriculture and partly by trade. At the age of twenty-three, he was married to Mansa Devi. Guru Amar Das was a devout believer in the Vaishnav faith, and used to fast every eleventh day. He always thought that human life was passing in vain and he longed for the guidance of a religious teacher to make it profitable. Guru Amar Das then seriously began his search for a Guru. One day, he heard the dulcet chanting of the Guru’s hymns by Bibi Amro (Guru Angad Dev’s daughter), who lived in his brother’s house. On hearing the hymn, Guru Amar Das was so deeply absorbed in devotion that he wanted to meet the Guru. Thus Guru Amar Das, found his Guru.95

As a result of his service and dedication Guru Angad made him his successor. Guru Angad Dev sent for five copper coins and a coconut, bathed Guru Amar Das, clothed him in a new dress, and installed him in the Guru’s seat. Bhai Buddha affixed to his forehead, the tilak of Guruship. Thus, was Guru Amar Dass, regularly and solemnly

appointed Guru Angad’s successor. Guru Amar Das (1552-74), expected every visitor to partake of the food in *Guru Ka Langar*, before seeing him. Emperor Akbar, who had once come to meet him, had to eat out of the common kitchen like any other pilgrim. A distinctive contribution of the third Guru to the growth of the Sikh organization was the establishment of twenty-two *Manjis* (dioceses), covering several parts of India, to preach the mission of Guru Nanak. Upliftment of Women, was the aim of the social reforms he introduced. He severely denounced, in particular, the customs of *Purdah* (Veil) and the custom of *Sati* (Self-Immolation by a widow, on the funeral pyre of her husband). He presented the ideal of personal service. He breathed his last in the month of Bhadon, Sambat 1631 (1574 A.D.), after a spiritual reign of 22 years.

Guru Ram Das (1574-1581), was the third Guru’s son-in-law. He proved a true and devoted disciple and achieved such perfect kinship with the Guru that the latter nominated him as his successor. For seven years Guru Ram Das guided the destinies of the new faith. He founded the town of Amritsar which in course of time became the centre of Sikh religion and the most flourishing trading city of Northern India.

Before his death in 1581, Guru Ram Das chose his youngest son, Arjan, as the Successor Guru. The principle of nomination was upheld, but it was restricted to the family of Guru Ram Das. Guru Arjan Dev was only eighteen years old at the time of his nomination. He was the first of the Gurus who laid aside the rosary and the garb of a faqir and dressed himself in costly attire and converted the saintly *Gaddi* of his pious predecessors into a princely rostrum. He kept a numerous retinue, fine horses and elephants and lived in splendour. He was an energetic and aspiring Guru and his aims were high. He organized the Sikhs into a community and devised measures for extending his spiritual authority. His first consideration was to ascertain whether the teachings of

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the great Guru Nanak were equally suited to the multifarious religious denominations and societies that then existed. He attempted to raise the followers of Guru Nanak in the scale of society, and, with a view to uniting them by one common religious tie, he gave them a religious code, which they held in the greatest veneration. In this code, he incorporated the sayings and verses of Guru Nanak, the compositions of his predecessors, and his own, and the choicest literary productions of other religious reformers of those times, whose memory was still fresh in the minds of the people. This code he called the “Granth”, or the Holy Book, and it was handed over to the Guru’s successors with an assurance that all it contained was pure and binding on all true disciples. A copy was kept in the Harmandir, or Holy temple, and recited each day to the crowds who came to bathe in the sacred tank. Hymns were sung in praise of the Lord by bands of musicians and the incidents of the life of Guru Nanak were repeated with great fervour. Thus a new spirit was infused into the minds of the followers of the Guru. He organized a system of charity and appointed delegates, or deputies, for the purposes of collecting it from his followers throughout the country. These contributions, or offerings, from the faithful were collected in all districts by means of the deputies abovementioned and presented by them to the Guru in an annual assembly.

Thus, were the Sikhs accustomed to a regular system of government and having been formed into a community, gradually developed into a real power. To increase the commonwealth, Guru Arjan Dev also sent his disciples to foreign countries for the purposes of trade, dealing principally in Turkistan horses. He completed the construction of the grand tank at Amritsar, and built the Darbar Sahib popularly called Harmandir in it. Another tank was built at Taran Taran in the Amritsar district. The death of Akbar brought a sudden reversal in the policy of the state towards the Sikhs. The new Emperor, Jahangir, disapproved of the growing popularity of Guru Arjan Dev.

Within eight months of Akbar’s death in October 1605, Guru Arjan Dev died the death of a martyr at the end of May, 1606, tortured by the new emperor’s underlings at Lahore. In the twenty-five years of Guru Arjan Dev’s ministry, the seed sown by Guru

Nanak blossomed into its fullness. The death of Guru Arjan Dev was a turning point in the history of the Punjab. He had brought the Hindu and Mussalman together in creating a scripture where both were represented and in raising a temple whose foundation was laid by a Muslim and a superstructure built by Hindus and Sikhs. He was a builder of cities and a merchant prince who brought prosperity to all communities. Guru Arjan Dev’s blood became the seed of the Sikh Church as well as that of the Punjabi nation.\(^{105}\)

J.S. Grewal, calls the accession of the Sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, as ‘transformation of the Sikh Panth’, while Khushwant Singh, refers to the same as ‘the call to arms’. With the sacrificial death of Guru Arjan Dev, the Sikhs gathered around the eleven-year old Guru Hargobind and the two veterans, Bhai Buddha and Bhai Gurdas, ready to avenge the death of their Guru.\(^{106}\) Alarmed at the increased meddling of the government into Sikh affairs, and particularly with the death of his father while in custody, Guru Hargobind styled his Guruship as a combination of the religious and political; not only did he represent the religious concerns of the Sikh Panth, he also wore arms, a symbol of his temporal power.\(^{107}\)

The young Guru Hargobind took the seat of his father with two swords girded around his waist: one to symbolize spiritual power and the other temporal. He made it known to his Sikhs that thereafter he would welcome offerings of arms and horses instead of money. He retained a body of soldiers and spent much time in martial exercise and hunting. He built a small fortress, Lohgarh (the Castle of Steel) in Amritsar. Across the Harmandir, he built the Akal Takht (the Throne of the Timeless God), where, instead of chanting hymns of peace, the congregation heard ballads extolling feats of heroism, and, instead of listening to religious discourses, discussed plans of military conquests. The Guru’s abode did infact become like that of the Emperor. He sat on a throne and held Court. He went out with a royal umbrella over his head and was always accompanied by armed retainers. With Guru Arjan Dev, the title Sachha Padshah, was only honorific, with Guru Hargobind it became a reality as far as the Sikhs were concerned. He was Miri Piri da Malik (the Lord of the Spiritual and Secular domains). For the first few years,


little notice was taken of the change in the complexion of the Sikh organization. But as the number of the Guru’s retainers increased, local officials began sending reports to the Emperor. Since the fine imposed by on Guru Arjan Dev had not been paid, there was legal justification to proceed against his son Jahangir. Jahangir ordered the arrest of Guru Hargobind and the disbandment of his private army. The Guru spent a year or more in imprisonment at Gwalior. He resumed his martial activity as soon as he was released, only a little more discreetly.108

Guru Hargobind combined the qualities of a warrior, a saint and a sportsman. While Guru Nanak abstained from animal food, Guru Hargobind had no such inhibitions. He was the first Guru who organized a military system, and, arming his followers, made them buckle on the sword, and prepared them for action on the field. He was induced to resort to arms in order to chastise his enemy and was able to avenge himself as he thought best. Guru Hargobind surpassed his predecessor in splendour and state. He maintained a large establishment, which he was enabled to do by the daily increasing income derived from the offerings which were now collected in the form of tithe from the faithful throughout the country, under the system introduced by Guru Arjan Dev. He had eight hundred fine horses in his stables, and kept a numerous, gorgeous and well-equipped retinue. He built the town of Hargobindpur on the banks of the Bias, to serve, in case of an emergency, as a place of retreat.109

In the fifteen odd years between his release from Gwalior and Jehangir’s death in A.D. 1627, Hargobind consolidated his spiritual and temporal hold on the community. He traveled through the Punjab into Uttar Pradesh as far as Pilibhit. He then went northwards into Kashmir. All along the routes of his travels he had temples built and appointed missionaries who could initiate the converts into the pacifist faith of Nanak and the martial mission of Hargobind. On his way back to Amritsar, he accepted from the Raja of Bilaspur a gift of a plot of land lying between the foothills of the Himalayas and the river Sutlej. Here he built himself a retreat which he named Kiratpur (the abode of praise.110

109 Syad Muhammad Latif, *History of the Panjab, from the remotest antiquity to the present time*, New Delhi, p.255.
Conscious of the strength and resources of the ruling power and his own comparative weakness, the sixth Guru, retired to the jungles of Bhatinda, south of the Sutlej, to avoid a further encounter with the imperial army. Here he converted great crowds to the faith of Guru Nanak.\textsuperscript{111} With the death of Jahangir and the accession of Shah Jahan in A.D. 1627, the Guru’s real troubles began. However, Guru Hargobind infused in his followers, the confidence that they could challenge the might of the Mughal Emperor. Great numbers of peasants answered the call to arms. Guru Hargobind chose Gurditta’s second son, Har Rai, to succeed him as the seventh Guru. Guru Hargobind died peacefully at Kiratpur in March 1644.\textsuperscript{112}

Guru Har Rai, on succeeding the apostleship, established himself at Kiratpur, on the banks of the river Sutlej. He was a quiet and contented man, affable in his habits, and with no taste for war. The military spirit of the Sikhs, which had been so much fostered by Guru Hargobind, continued to flourish in his time, for although the Guru took particular care not to meddle with politics, circumstances were not wanting under which the Sikhs were compelled to exert their power and energy to strengthen factious feuds.\textsuperscript{113}

Guru Har Rai’s seventeen years of ministry were not marked by any spectacular events. Although he had inherited a militant tradition and a small army, he was a man of peace. He loved to hunt, but only to bring back wild animals for his private zoo at Kiratpur. He hated to hurt any living thing. Before his death, Guru Har Rai, had proclaimed the succession of his five-year old son, Har Krishan.\textsuperscript{114}

The investiture of Guru Har Krishan did not suit Aurangzeb, who wanted to play a decisive role in the affairs of the Sikhs. He summoned the infant Guru to Delhi with the intention of arbitrating between his claims and those of his elder brother, Ram Rai. After some hesitation, Guru Har Krishan arrived in Delhi and Aurangzeb was content to have both the claimants under his surveillance. Guru Har Krishan, was however, stricken with small-pox. Before he died, he indicated to the people, that the next Guru was not to be

either Ram Rai or Dhirmal, both of whom had been eagerly pressing their claims, but an older man living in the village of Bakala.\textsuperscript{115}

After the death of Guru Har Krishan, dissensions arose among the Sikhs as to the succession to the office of \textit{Sat Guru}, or Spiritual Leader. Tegh Bahadur, son of Guru Hargobind, had established himself at Bakala, near Goindwal, where two factions arose, one supporting the claims of Guru Tegh Bahadur, according to the will of the last Guru, and the other supporting the faction of the Sodhis, who had set up a Guru of their own. Ram Rai, a nephew of Guru Tegh Bahadur, remained at Delhi and aspired to be the next Guru.\textsuperscript{116}

It was quite clear that by his dying words “Baba Bakale”, Hari Krishen had meant his grand-uncle, Tegh Bahadur, who had been living in the village ever since the death of his father Hargobind in 1644. Tegh Bahadur was a man of retiring habits who did not wish to fight for his rights. But, his very reluctance to press for recognition turned the Sikh masses in his favour. However, he had to face a lot of opposition from detractors in the path to Guruship. He was compelled to retire into the wilderness and bought a hillock near the village of Makhowal, five miles north of Kiratpur, and built himself a village, where he could be away from his contentious relations.\textsuperscript{117}

Before the end of 1665, Guru Tegh Bahadur left Makhowal to establish contact with some of the Sikh centres (\textit{Sangats}) in the Mughal provinces of the Gangetic plain. He left his family at Patna to be looked after by the local Sikhs, before he moved on with his mission. It was here in Patna that his son was born on December 22, 1666. In the first five or six years of his pontificate, Guru Tegh Bahadur traveled more than any of his predecessors after Guru Nanak. In 1673, Guru Tegh Bahadur moved out of Makhowal, to impart his message of reassurance to peasants and Zamindars in the province of Delhi. The Guru was making a public demonstration of his convictions at a time when the emperor was bent upon discouraging such demonstrations. A delegation of Kashmiri Brahmans met Guru Tegh Bahadur at Makhowal in May, 1675, with a woeful tale of religious persecution in the valley of Kashmir by its Mughal governor. After a deep reflection on the situation, Guru Tegh Bahadur decided to court martyrdom to uphold his


beliefs. In July, 1675, he nominated his young son Gobind Das as the successor-Guru and moved out of Makhowal. He was arrested soon after he entered the Mughal territory in the Pargana of Ropar and kept in custody for nearly four months in the Sarkar of Sirhind before he was taken to Delhi in November, 1675. In Delhi, he was asked to perform a miracle as the proof of his nearness to God. He refuted the idea that occult powers were a proof of one’s nearness to God. As a result, he was asked to accept Islam. Guru Tegh Bahadur refused to accept Islam, and was publicly beheaded in Chandni Chowk, the main market-square close to the Red Fort, on the 11th of November, 1675. Guru Tegh Bhadur’s supreme sacrifice in the cause not only of his own faith but also in the cause of freedom of conscience in general was admired by his son and successor. Metaphorically, he protected the sacred thread (Janju) and the sacred mark (Tilak) of the men of faith.\textsuperscript{118}

The first decade of Guru Gobind Singh’s pontificate was rather uneventful. Growing into manhood, he received literary and religious education, and also training in the use of arms. He inspired his young companions and followers to take interest in martial activity.\textsuperscript{119} Guru Gobind Singh drew the sword while he was still at Paonta. Like his grandfather Guru Hargobind, he let it be known that he would welcome offerings in arms and horses; and, more than the offerings, he would welcome able-bodied men willing to join his crusade. However, his military preparations greatly alarmed the hilly rajas, who came into an armed conflict with him and his followers in the future. They did not like the growing power of the Guru in their region, nor, what appeared to them as an even greater danger, the increased subordination of the lower castes, who had begun to turn to the casteless fraternity of the Sikhs for leadership. When threats failed to dislodge the Guru, the chiefs tried to eject him by force. A series of historic battles ensued which changed the course of Sikh history.\textsuperscript{120}

In this struggle, the Mughals became involved too. The Guru had also to deal with the internal dissensions within the Panth and therefore, decided to bring about some changes in the organization of the Sikhs. Before giving practical shape to these ideas, Guru Gobind Singh decided to abolish the institution of Masands which had become a

\textsuperscript{118} J.S. Grewal, \textit{The Sikhs of the Punjab}, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 70-72.
\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Ibid}, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{120} Khushwant Singh, \textit{A History of the Sikhs (1469-1839)}, Vol. 1, 2004, pp. 7-78.
fertile cause of disruption in the community. Next he gathered a huge crowd of his followers at Anandpur, where he announced that the Panj Piyare (Five Beloved Ones), baptized by him, would be the nucleus of a new community he would raise which was to be called the Khalsa, or the Pure. The turbulent period that followed this baptismal ceremony did not give the Guru much time to explain the significance of the symbols, he made obligatory for his followers. By doing this, Guru Gobind Singh wanted to raise an army of soldier-saints who would wield arms only in a righteous cause, as would saints if they were so compelled. He gave the institution of Guruship a permanent and abiding character by vesting it in the immortality of the Guru Granth Sahib and in the continuity of the Khalsa Panth. Being the author of so many traditions, he was particularly conscious of the danger of his followers imposing divinity on him. The only change Guru Gobind Singh brought in religion was to expose the other side of the medal. Whereas Guru Nanak had propagated goodness, Guru Gobind Singh condemned evil. Sikh chronicles maintain that the baptism of twenty thousand Sikhs at Anandpur was followed by baptisms all over Northern India. After this, Guru Gobind Singh had to prepare himself for the more serious trouble which he knew lay ahead of him. The trouble he had anticipated was not long in coming. The hill rajas approached the Emperor and warned him of the growing power of the Guru. Aurangzeb ordered the Subedars (district governors) of Sirhind and Lahore to help the rajas destroy the Khalsa.

After making a journey into the Deccan, Guru Gobind Singh settled at Nanded on the banks of the river Godavari, in 1707. After Aurangzeb’s death the government was led by the new Emperor, Bahadur Shah. A few days later Guru Gobind Singh was stabbed and badly wounded by an Afghan. On October 7, 1708, he breathed his last. He did not nominate any individual as his successor. The decision taken by Guru Gobind Singh did not abolish Guruship itself but personal Guruship. The position of the Guru was henceforth given to the Khalsa and to Shabad-Bani.

Thus ended, at the young age of forty two, an amazing character in the history of the human race. He assumed secular and spiritual responsibilities not for only his

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122 Ibid, p. 83.
immediate followers, but for human freedom in general, for man’s dignity and his right to his personal beliefs and ways of life. The Guru created not only a community of warriors, but men, who would, even during war-time, never forsake God, and whose victories would be for the sake of Dharma, and not for self-glory or greed. Although, the Guru fought and won many battles, he never claimed the fruits thereof. He infused a democratic spirit into the khalsa brotherhood.¹²⁵

The two hundred years between Guru Nanak’s proclamation of faith (A.D. 1499) and Guru Gobind Singh’s founding of the Khalsa Panth (A.D. 1699) can be neatly divided into two almost equal parts. In the first hundred years the five Gurus pronounced the ideals of a new social order for the Punjab. The second period of a hundred years saw the development of traditions which supplemented this social order. The sixth Guru was the first to appeal to arms, the tenth put the army on a regular footing. The movement also found its martyrs and heroes: Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur and the sons of Guru Gobind Singh wore the crown of martyrdom; Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh, the Halo of heroism. The movement had its inner core consisting of nearly a hundred thousand baptized Khalsa, and a much larger number of close associates among the Sahajdari Sikhs.¹²⁶

Guru Arjan Dev (1581-1606), the fifth Guru, played a role in the Sikh movement consistent with his place in the numerical order. The work of the first four Guru’s was preparatory. It assumed definite form in the days of Guru Arjan Dev, who gave to Sikhism its scripture, the Holy Guru Granth Sahib and a central place of worship, the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar. He thought, by example, non-violence in thought and deed and adherence to truth in face of the hardest trial. The later Guru’s expounded the tenets of Sikhism as embodied in the Holy Granth and inculcated the principle of sacrifice laid down by Guru Arjan Dev. He thus marked the central point in the development of the Sikh religion.¹²⁷ The first task Guru Arjan Dev undertook was the completion of the Amritsar tank. Sikhs came from all over the country to join in the work of digging. This kind of voluntary labour of love called Sewa, or Service, is considered by the Sikhs an act

¹²⁷ Harbans Singh, The Heritage of The Sikhs, Delhi, 1964, p. 25.
of highest merit and virtue. The Guru also started extending the town of Amritsar, then called Ramdaspur after the name of the founder, Guru Ram Das.\textsuperscript{128} He then set about compiling a sacred book for the faithful. Messages were sent to Sikhs all over the country to collect and pass on to him the hymns of his predecessors. Since the Guru’s had traveled extensively, their compositions lay scattered all over the country. Some committed to writing by their followers and handed down from one generation to another by word of mouth. The Guru also collected songs and hymns of other Indian saints, both Hindu and Muslim, which were in keeping with the spirit of the new faith. He incorporated in the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, compositions of Muslims such as Sheikh Farid and the so-called Shudras such as Ravidas. Guru Arjan Dev was himself a great poet. He added to the sacred volume his own hymns full of divine love and deep human sympathy and awareness. These hymns were arranged according to \textit{Ragas}, or musical measures.\textsuperscript{129}

The inauguration of the \textit{Khalsa} was the culmination of the canonical period of the development of Sikhism. The most visible symbols of Sikhism known as \textit{the Five Ks}—namely uncut hair, a wrist ring, a short sword, a comb for the topknot, and breeches—are mandatory to the Khalsa. Guru Gobind Singh terminated the line of personal Gurus before he passed away in 1708, and installed the Guru Granth Sahib. Thereafter, the authority of the Guru was to vest in the Holy scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, and the corporate community itself.\textsuperscript{130}

Harbans Singh in his “Heritage of the Sikhs” views the developments in eighteenth century Punjab, as a period of great political upheaval and turmoil. It witnessed a prolonged drama of constant battle, foreign invasion and internal conflict. Warring powers, such as the Mughals, Marathas and Afghans, strove with each other for supremacy. Their mutual fighting produced conditions of utter confusion and anarchy. The Mughal authority in the Punjab had begun showing signs of weakness soon after Aurangzeb’s death in 1707, and the subsequent perplexity and disharmony continued until 1799, when Ranjit Singh, occupied Lahore and laid the foundations of a peaceful state.

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Ibid}, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{130} "http://family.jrank.org/pages/1568/Sikhism-Origins-Development-Sikhism.html"\textgreater; Sikhism - The Origins And Development Of Sikhism</a>
For Sikhs this was a time of grim trial and of supreme moral exaltation which accrued to them because of their heroic fight for their faith and their perseverance in meeting the challenge of a sustained and fierce persecution. To crushing their existence the Mughal rulers had, in fact, vowed themselves. The Sikhs on their part matched the situation with a rare power of endurance and resolution. They sanctified this period of their history with deeds of unparalleled sacrifice and courage and the Sikh character presented in this testing time its noblest aspect. In the strife that was forced upon them lay seed of their subsequent political ascendancy and they were able to set up their authority in the Punjab after vanquishing their persecutors. History records a high and unusual tribute to Sikhs’ qualities of courage and integrity during this period of harrowing oppression.\textsuperscript{131}

The period of eight years after the death of Guru Gobind Singh in October 1708, is essentially centred around the activities of Banda Singh. He was conferred the title \textit{Bahadur} by Guru Gobind Singh.\textsuperscript{132}

The Sikh leader who presaged a troublous century’s daring chain of events was Banda Singh Bahadur. From Nanded, where the last of the Sikh prophets, Guru Gobind Singh, had died, he came to the Punjab armed with the Guru’s blessings and with a drum, a banner and five arrows as emblems of the authority the Guru had bestowed upon him. He issued \textit{Hukamnamas}, or Edicts, to Sikhs in the Punjab calling upon them to join him. His object was to attack the town of Sirhind where two of Guru Gobind Singh’s sons had met with a cruel fate at the hands of Wazir Khan, the Mughal governor. Seizing Samana and Sadhaura, Banda Singh Bahadur reached Sirhind on May 14, 1710, and occupied the town routing the army of Wazir Khan. Baj Singh, one of Banda Singh’s leading companions, was made the governor of Sirhind. Banda Singh Bahadur thus laid the foundation of Sikh sovereignty in the Punjab. He assumed the style of royalty and struck coin in the name of the Guru. Banda Singh Bahadur’s rule, though short-lived, had a far-reaching impact on the history of the Punjab. With it began the decay of Mughal authority and the demolition of the feudal system it had created. Banda Singh Bahadur abolished the Zamindari system and made the tillers masters of the lands they had been

cultivating for their landlords. This marked a revolutionary change in the social order in the Punjab and led to the emergence of peasants as a potent force in the political life of the country. Banda Singh Bahadur’s increasing influence roused the ire of the Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah, who journeyed northwards from the Deccan to punish the Sikhs. Instructions were issued to the Subadars of Delhi and Oudh and the other Mughal officers to march towards the Punjab. Prohibitory laws against the Sikhs were passed. The massive imperial force drove the Sikhs from Sirhind and other places to take shelter in the fort of Lohgarh in the submontane region. Further reinforcements arrived and they invested Banda’s hilly retreat. Sikhs were reduced to rigorous straits. They killed their horses for food and when they could stand up to the enemy any longer, they made a desperate nightly sally to escape into the hills of Nahan. However, the Sikhs fought back with more determination than before. Sikhs came out of their mountainous haunts to recover their lost territories and occupied once again Sadhaura and Lohgarh.

Farrukh Siyar, who came to the throne of Delhi in 1713, launched against them the sternest proceedings that political authority stirred with a fanatical religious zeal could devise. They were hounded out of the plains of the Punjab and their main column, under Banda Singh Bahadur, was subjected to a most stringent siege at the village of Gurdas-Nangal was the epic of purest heroism in face of heavy odds. The supplies having run out, the Sikhs suffered grave hardship and lived on animal flesh which they had to eat raw, for there was no fuel to make a fire. For eight long months, the garrison resisted the siege under these gruesome conditions. The royal armies at last broke through and captured Banda Singh Bahadur and his famishing Sikhs. Nearly three hundred of them were killed on the spot. The rest, along with Banda Singh Bahadur, were taken to Lahore, and, thence to Delhi. The cavalcade of the imperial capital formed a most awesome spectacle. Besides, 740 prisoners in heavy chains, it comprised seven hundred cartloads of the heads of decapitated Sikhs with another 2,000 stuck upon pikes.\footnote{Harbans Singh, \textit{The Heritage of the Sikhs}, Asia Publishing House, Calcutta, 1964, pp. 46-49.}

Ganda Singh, in his preface to ‘Life of Banda Singh Bahadur’, writes that the case of Banda Singh Bahadur, presents, perhaps, the strangest array of difficulties and paradoxes in the whole range of Sikh biography.\footnote{Ganda Singh, \textit{Life of Banda Bahadur}, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2006, p. xii.} Ganda Singh further states that the
character of Banda Singh Bahadur, was full of ever-readiness for the emancipation of his oppressed and persecuted countrymen and an unflinching devotion to the Guru and his religion. Apart from this, many misunderstandings have gathered round his person as a result of the fruitful imagination of some writers. Every act of cruelty, which their fertile imagination could invent, has been ascribed to him. Ganda Singh believes that he was a far different man from what he has been represented to be. The scanty records of the contemporary Muslim histories, there being literally no contemporary Sikh records available on the subject give little information as to many qualities that he possessed, ‘but he is allowed, on all hands, to have been a man of undoubted valour and bravery, and the coolness, with which he met his death.’ It would seem how sagacious Guru Gobind Singh was in selecting such a man for carrying on his struggle for the independence of his people. Indeed Banda Singh’s conversion from an inert ascetic into ‘a commander of the forces of the Khalsa’ was nothing short of the Guru’s miracle. Nor did Banda Singh Bahadur betray the trust reposed in him by his Holy Master. Ganda Singh goes on to quote McGregor’s *History of the Sikhs*, ‘Banda was a fanatic and so resolved was he to fulfil the orders of Govind Singh, that he became the terror of the whole Punjab as well as the districts on this side of the Punjab’. In spite of all the power that he commanded, he is not recorded to have used force in his missionary work. In his zeal for the emancipation of the persecuted and down-trodden, he earned the blessings of the poor and the destitute whose cries had not been heard by any one for centuries past. He raised the lowest of the low to the highest positions under his government. The untouchables and the unapproachables, the so-called sweepers and pariahs, were raised to the position of rulers. In matters of Government, he introduced one of the greatest fiscal reforms in the country by abolishing the Zamindari system of the Mughals which had reduced the cultivators to the position of slaves. With the establishment of Banda Singh Bahadur’s *Raj*, the actual cultivators of the soil became the proprietors of their holdings, and the oppression resulting from the old system was for ever eradicated from the Punjab. In his personal conduct as a Sikh, he was, throughout, a devoted follower of Sikhism, and his faith in the Gurus remained unshaken. At the Zenith of his power, his inscription on his seal and his coins is an everlasting monument of his over-flowing devotion to Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, whom he proclaimed to be the fountains of his *Deg* and *Tegh*, or Plenty
and Power. With the exception of his ‘Fateh Darshan’ and the celebration of his marriage, there is nothing in the whole history of his life to warrant the allegations levelled against him by some prejudiced Sikh and non-Sikh writers.\footnote{Ganda Singh, \textit{Op.cit}, pp. 237-42. See also; Kiranjit Sandhu, \textit{Banda Singh Bahadur (1708-1716)}, M.Phil. Dissertation, Department of History, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1983.}

Next to the Guru, Banda Singh Bahadur was the first person to place before the Sikhs practical demonstration of staunch nationalism, and to teach them to sacrifice themselves smilingly at the altar of the Khalsa.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, p. 256.} He was the first man to deal a severe blow to the intolerant rule of the Mughals in the Punjab. Although it was forty years after his death that the capital of Lahore was occupied by the Khalsa and a regular Sikh Badshahat was declared, with Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia as Padshah, it was Banda Singh Bahadur who laid the foundation of the Sikh Empire in 1710. Banda Singh Bahadur was one of the most remarkable men that India has produced in the eighteenth century.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, pp. 256-57.} It can be said in that under Banda Singh Bahadur, the serfs of the Punjab had their first taste of freedom from their Mughal masters, though only for a brief period. This was the first real blow to the organized exploitation of the Punjab. It laid the foundation for the real conquest of the Punjab by the Sikhs, forty years later.\footnote{Kharak Singh and Daljeet Singh (eds.), \textit{Sikhism-Its Philosophy and History}, Chandigarh, 1997, p. 447.} The gruesome death of Banda Bahadur left the Sikhs leaderless for a time. They could not believe how a man of his daring, sacrifice and near-miraculous deeds could come to such an tragic end. The shock was too overwhelming for some who, it appears, tried to explain it away by attributing his ultimate failure (if one may call it such) and brutal death to his having abandoned the true path of Guru Gobind Singh. This naturally led to a schism in the community, Banda Singh Bahadur’s immediate followers, now called ‘Bandais’, defending their hero to the hilt.\footnote{Gopal Singh, \textit{A History of the Sikh People (1469-1988)}, Allied Publishers Pvt. Limited, New Delhi, 2005, p. 359.}

June 1716, marks the end of a short but glorious chapter in Sikh history. It also marks the beginning of a critical phase, when the Sikhs were almost wiped out in existence. After Banda Singh Bahadur, the Sikhs had nobody who could rally their
divided and disheartened groups into any sort of a united force.\textsuperscript{140} For a quarter of a century after the martyrdom of Banda Singh Bahadur, vigorous persecution of the Sikhs was continued under the government of Abdus Samad Khan and his son and successor Zakariya Khan ‘Khan Bahadur’. Driven out of towns, caught and massacred in their villages, hunted down like wild beasts in the jungles, and burnt to death in their hiding places in the Punjab, they were forced to take refuge in the eastern and north-eastern hills, in the Lakhri jungle tract of the Malwa Districts and in the sandy deserts of Bikaner.\textsuperscript{141}

According to Harbans Singh, every fresh adversity imposed on the Sikhs only stimulated their will to survival and self-assertion. A commanding figure who led them through this dark and exilic period was Nawab Kapur Singh, the founder of the Dal Khalsa. By his bold example and wise leadership, he welded the Sikhs into a strong fighting force and implanted in their minds the vision of an independent state. He was the true embodiment of Sikh character forged by the alchemy of a fiery ordeal and enjoyed unique esteem for his spirit of courage, sacrifice and religious devotion. When, in pursuance of peace, an offer of Nawabship and a \textit{Jagir} for the Sikhs came from the Mughal Government, he was unanimously chosen by the Sikhs to receive the title on their behalf. Nawab Kapur Singh then undertook to consolidate the disintegrated fabric of the Sikh organization. The whole body of the Khalsa was formed into two sections, Buddha Dal (Army of Veterans) and Taruna Dal (Army of the Youthful). The former was entrusted with the task of looking after the holy places, preaching the Guru’s word and inducting converts into the Khalsa Panth by holding baptismal ceremonies.

Nawab Kapur Singh was himself the in-charge of this section. The Taruna Dal was the more active division and its function was to fight in times of emergency. Nawab Kapur Singh’s personality was the common link between the two wings of the Dal Khalsa. He was universally reverenced for his high character. Later on Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, as leader of the Dal Khalsa, occupied Lahore in 1761. He was proclaimed by the Sikhs the \textit{Sultan-Ul-Qaum}, or King of the Nation. Meanwhile the Taruna Dal rapidly grew in strength and soon numbered more than 12,000. To ensure efficient control, Nawab Kapur


Singh split it into five parts, each with a separate centre. Each batch had its own banner and drum, and formed the nucleus of a separate political State. The territories conquered by these groups were entered in their respective papers at Akal Takht to avoid any conflict or confusion. From these documents (or Misls) the principalities carved out by them came to be known as Misls. Seven more groups formed subsequently and, towards the close of the century, there were altogether twelve Sikh Misls ruling between them.

The entente with the Mughals did not last long and, before the harvest of 1735, Zakriya Khan, the subadar of Lahore, sent a force and occupied the Jagir. The Mughal Government once again pursued its policy of persecution with greater vigour and thoroughness. To cut off the Sikhs from their chief source of inspiration, the Amritsar temple was taken possession of and guarded by the military to prevent the Sikhs from visiting it. Sikhs began living in exile in the Shivalik hills, Lakhji jungle and the sandy deserts of Rajputana. Many a heroic tale of the daring adventures of the Sikhs is recounted, the most dramatic and valorous being that of Mehtab Singh of Mirankot and Sukha Singh. Alarmed by such acts of bravery, the Subadar of Lahore, Zakriya Khan, sent a strong force under Samad Khan to seek out the Sikhs. When the latter heard that Samad Khan was pursuing them, they came out to fight openly the tyrant who was responsible for the torturous killing of Bhai Mani Singh, the revered Sikh divine. Samad Khan was killed in the action and the Mughal force suffered a severe reverse. Nawab Kapur Singh now made a plan to capture Zakriya Khan but unfortunately his plan failed. The Buddha Dal once again crossed the Sutlej and marched right upto the vicinity of Delhi.  

The Sikhs attacked and pursued the Persian invader, Nadir Shah, in the early months of 1739, as he was returning home after a hearty plunder of Delhi and the Punjab. Meanwhile, Zakriya Khan carried out his policy of repression with redoubled zeal. A pitiless campaign of manhunt was started. Sikhs’ heads sold for money and the Mughals offered a prize for each head brought to them. This difficult period is full of countless deeds of heroism and sacrifice. To encompass the destruction of the defiant race, the Mughal governor of Lahore and his minister, Lakhpat Rai, launched an all-out campaign and set forth with a large army. The Sikhs, on their part, put up a determined fight, but

were overwhelmed by the superior numbers of the enemy and scattered with heavy losses. They were chased into the hills and hunted down. More than seven thousand Sikhs lost their lives.\textsuperscript{143}

So indiscriminate and, considering the total Sikh population in those days, so extensive was the killing that the campaign is known in Sikh history as the First \textit{Ghalughara}, or Holocaust. In 1748, a section of the Dal Khalsa, under Charhat Singh, grandfather of Ranjit Singh, gave chase to the fleeing troops of Ahmad Shah Durrani, the Afghan Invader of India. The other, at the instance of Nawab Kapur Singh, decided to march towards Amritsar. Nawab Kapur Singh entrusted the command of this campaign to Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. For a quarter odd a century, Nawab Kapur Singh had led the Sikhs through most trying and difficult times. Few men had ever to contend with heavier odds; few ever engaged in such an unequal fight. Yet, striving valiantly against strenuous circumstances, he step by step built up the sovereignty of the Khalsa and by the time he retired, he had conferred on the Dal the lineaments of an independent State. In the midst of this life-long preoccupation with war and fighting, he maintained an irreproachable ethical standard and was universally esteemed for his devout character and heroic spirit.\textsuperscript{144}

From 1708, when Banda Singh Bahadur set out for the Punjab, to the end of 1768, the Sikhs had been locked in a life and death struggle, first with the Mughal power, and then with the powerful Afghan invader. It had taken them 60 years of blood and toil and an unshakeable faith in their ultimate success (\textit{Raj Karega Khalsa}), to emerge finally as masters of their own destiny in the land of five rivers.\textsuperscript{145}

Ahmad Shah Durrani’s repeated invasions brought further chaos to the Punjab and added to the perplexities of the Delhi kingdom. In the dissipation of the authority of the Mughal Government, the Sikhs had the opportunity of extending their influence and assuming power as successors to the Muslim rule in Northern India. But before this culmination was reached, they had to pass through another terrible ordeal of fire and blood. By their stern and obstinate opposition to Ahmad Shah Durrani and constant

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Ibid}, p. 58.
harassment of his armies and his vice-regents in the Punjab, they had earned the direst wrath of the Afghan Emperor who came out more than once pledged to exacting vengeance and scourging the entire sect. Before Ahmad Shah Durrani launched his onslaughts against them, the Sikhs had been through another spell of hideous tyranny and persecution at the hands of the Governor of Lahore. Mir Mannu (1748-53) proved a worse foe of the Sikhs than his predecessors, Zakriya Khan and Yahiya Khan, and started the witchhunt with even greater fierceness and severity. Sikhs (men, women and children) were apprehended from wherever his soldiers could lay their hands on them and brought to Lahore for daily executions. So ruthless was Mannu’s campaign against them that his name passed into contemporary folk-tradition. The Sikhs called him their “sickle” which moved them mercilessly. “But the more the sickle mows, the more we multiply”, they sang, defiantly. The Sikhs were especially the target of Ahmad Shah Durrani’s sixth excursion into India. News had reached him in Afghanistan of the defeat, after his withdrawal from the country, of his general, Nur-ud-Din Bamezei, at the hands of the Sikhs who were fast spreading themselves out over the Punjab and had declared their leader Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, King of Lahore (1761). To rid his Indian dominions of them once for all, he set out from Qandahar. Marching with alacrity, Ahmad Shah Durrani overtook the Sikhs as they were drawing into the Malwa after crossing the Sutlej.146

Surprised by Ahmad Shah Durrani, the Sikhs threw a cordon round those who needed protection, and prepared for the battle. In this formation and continuing their march, they fought the invaders and their Indian allies desperately. The Sikh Sardars, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Charhat Singh, Karora Singh, Hari Singh and Nahar Singh, led their forces with skill and courage. Near the village of Kup, six miles from Malerkotla, about 15,000 Sikhs lay on that ghastly field at the end of a single day’s action (February 5, 1762). In this battle known in the Sikh history as Wadda Ghalughara, or the Great Killing, was also lost the volume of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib prepared by Guru Gobind Singh at Damdama Sahib. Even such a disaster as had overtaken them at Kup caused no despondency among Sikhs. Within four months of the Ghalughara, the Sikhs had inflicted a sever defeat on the Governor of Sirhind. Four months later, they were

celebrating Diwali in Harmandir which Ahmad Shah Durrani had demolished, and were fighting with him again a pitched battle forcing him to withdraw from Amritsar under the cover of darkness (October 17, 1762).  

Although the Punjab was claimed to be part of the dominions of Ahmad Shah Durrani who had his nominees, they were helpless witnesses to the changing fortunes. While a batch of Sikhs remained in Amritsar under the leadership of Charhat Singh to cleanse the Holy tank and rebuild the temple, destroyed and desecrated by Ahmad Shah Durrani, the rest of them went about establishing their own *Thanas* and fortresses in the country. These acquisitions were then recorded in the *Misl* of each Sardar at Akal Takht at Amritsar. The Sikhs thus liberated the Punjab from foreign rule inch by inch and became symbols of India’s honour and independence. The Sikhs crossed the Sutlej under the command of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. They took a bloody vengeance on Bhikhan Khan of Malerkotla for the part he had played in the *Ghalughara*. The Sikhs now had a free run of the country and they ranged abroad unchecked obtaining surrender of far-flung provinces. The Sukkarchakkias, the Nakais, the Kanhaiyas and the Ramgarhias returned to the north of the Sutlej. They took the Jullunder Doab and advanced towards Lahore.

The Sikh insurrection in the Punjab caused grave dismay to Ahmad Shah Durrani. He planned yet another crusade. Ahmad Shah Durrani started from Afghanistan at the head of a strong army in the month of October, 1764. The Sikhs, following their usual tactics, withdrew out of the invader’s way retiring to their jungle haunts. He reached Lahore and on December 1, 1764, attacked Amritsar which he had destroyed and polluted several times before to gratify his own malice and to seal the source of Sikhs’ religious and moral replenishment. A small batch of thirty Sikhs stood their lives to protect their holy shrines. The Sikhs resumed their territories and reasserted their authority in the country. On Baisakhi day, (April 10, 1765), barely a fortnight after

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Ahmad Shah Durrani had left, they took counsel at Amritsar and resolved to capture Lahore.\footnote{Harbans Singh, \textit{Op.cit}, p. 64.}

The fear of his Indian Empire falling to the Sikhs continued to obsess Ahmad Shah Durrani’s mind and he led out another punitive campaign against them. This was his eighth invasion of India. The Sikhs had recourse to their old game of hide-and-seek. They vacated Lahore, but faced squarely the Afghan general, Jahan Khan, at Amritsar, forcing him to retreat, with six thousand of the Durrani soldiers killed.\footnote{Loc.cit.}

The outcome of the unequal, but bitter, contest lay clearly in favour of the Sikhs. The ageing Ahmad Shah Durrani had realized that his Indian dominions were at the mercy of the Sikhs and he bowed to the inevitable. His own soldiers were getting restive and the summer heat of the Punjab was becoming unbearable. He, at last, decided to return home, but took a different this time to avoid molestation by the Sikhs. As soon as Ahmad Shah Durrani retired, the Sikhs reoccupied their territories. The entire country between the Indus and the Jamuna owned Sikh supremacy. Twelve Sikh independencies, known as \textit{Misl}s, had formed in this process of Punjab’s emancipation. The Ahluwalias, who derived their title from the village in which their leader Jassa Singh was born, held territory in the neighbourhood of Kapurthala in the Jullundur Doab and some villages in the Majha such as Sarhali, Jandiala, Bundala, Varioval and Fatehabad. The Bhangis, Jats of the Dhillon caste, owned Sialkot, Gujrat, Multan, Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Lahore. The Ramgarhias who took their name from Ramgarh (originally, Ram Rauni), the Sikh fort at Amritsar, had in their possession Qadian, Batala and Sri Hargobindpur, in the Bari Doab, and Miani, Sarih and Urmur Tanda, in the Jullundur Doab. To Singhpurias, Virk Jats, belonged Jullundur and the villages of Banur, Ghanauli, Manauli and Bharatgarh, in the Malwa. The Sukkarchakkias possessed Gujranwala and parts of Pothohar and the Kanhaiyas the pargana of Batala. The Shahids, Sandhu Jats, descendants of honoured martyrs such as Baba Deep Singh, had their possessions in the present districts of Ambala (pargana of Shahzadpur), and Saharanpur, in Uttar Pradesh. The Nakais ruled over the country south of Lahore between the Ravi and the Sutlej and the Dallewalias, under Tara Singh Ghaiba, held Rahon, Mahatpur, Nawanshahar and
Phillaur, in the Jullundur Doab. The Nishanwalas, the standard-bearers of the Khalsa army, had their centre at Ambala. The Karorsinghias, adopting the name of their leader, Karora Singh, a Virk Jat of Birkian, took Hoshiarpur and the surrounding district. The Phulkias embraced the territories of Patiala, Sirhind, Nabha and Jind.¹⁵³

What compelled these Sikh confederacies to selflessly united and zealous action was their faith in the common destiny of the Khalsa. Any call for a Panthic cause was joyfully answered and greatest sacrifices willingly made for its realization. Their living conviction that the Guru had invested them with moral and temporal dignity and charged them with the duty of liberating the country imparted an element of philanthropy to their extremely dangerous and heroic adventure. This brave new spirit created a revolutionary impulse in the country. The Sikhs thus gave a new direction to the course of Indian history. When Shah Zaman, the grandson of Ahmad Shah Durranı, reached Peshawar on January 30, 1799, harassed and plundered by the Sikhs on his homeward journey after his Indian adventure, history had taken a decisive turn. No more Muslim invaders came to India from the north-west as had been happening for more than a thousand years. Though the times were troublous and uncertain and the Misaldar Sardars engaged in endless fighting, they preserved in their territories “good order and a regular government”.¹⁵⁴

Themselves victims of the worst kind of religious tyranny, the leaders of the Sikh Misls established a just and humane rule. They treated the Muslims with tolerance and made no distinctions among their subjects on grounds of caste or religion. In times of distress they helped them alike. In 1783, when the Punjab was struck by a severe famine, the Sikh chief continued their Langars to feed the poor and the needy.¹⁵⁵

It is a great pity that no contemporary records of the Sikhs in the form of dispatches, diaries, letters or news-sheets like those of the Marathas are available. The reason being that the sword had been the sole standby of the Sikh Sardars of the eighteenth-century and their followers who had not had the time and opportunity to learn the use of pen. Since the time of Emperor Bahadur Shah (1707-12), they had been under an official ban. They were not only outlawed but, according to an Imperial order of Emperor Bahadur Shah, they were also to be killed at sight wherever found. The order

was repeated by Emperor Farrukh Siyar in 1716, after the execution of Banda Singh Bahadur. This persecution of the Sikhs continued with more or less rigour for over forty years and ended only in November, 1753, with the death of Mir Mannu during whose time movable columns were dispatched from the provincial headquarters at Lahore to hunt them down like wild beasts, and prices were fixed for their heads. During this period, they had to leave their homes and seek shelter in hills, jungles and deserts and they had to struggle hard for their very existence. Their Gurdwaras and stock books were all burnt down. It was only in the Malwa districts, south of the Sutlej, that they had some repose. But there too they had no facilities for education. The Sikhs had also no Brahmans and Kayasths to work for them as writers. The Muslims in those days were opposed to them as a class. No Muslim scholar or poet, therefore, recorded their history. The result was that the Sikhs of the eighteenth century only made history, they had no time to write it.\textsuperscript{156}

The man who liquidated the warring misls, nurtured the consciousness of regional nationalism to forge a unified kingdom, and harnessed the restless energy of the Punjabis to conquer neighbouring countries was Ranjit Singh Sukerchakia.\textsuperscript{157}

The principalities the Sikhs had carved out were integrated into the sovereign State of the Khalsa by Ranjit Singh. Born heir to one of these confederacies, he had the foresight to visualize a united Sikh kingdom. By his superior military genius and political acumen, he succeeded in integrating the existing states and in joining the people of the Punjab into a strong nation. Ranjit Singh was born at Gujranwala, now in Pakistan, on November 13, 1780, in a family which had distinguished itself by its warlike exploits. His grandfather, Charhat Singh, struck against Ahmad Shah Durrani’s armies several times and renowned as a fearless fighter. Ranjit Singh belonged to the Sukkarchakkia Misl. Ranjit Singh, meaning the Victor of Battles, proved truly representative of his character and forestalled his career of conquest and victory.\textsuperscript{158} Ranjit Singh became the master of Lahore on July 7, 1799, and his rule brought relief and security to the people

\textsuperscript{156} Ganda Singh, \textit{Ahmad Shah Durrani : Father of Modern Afghanistan}, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1959, pp. ix, x.


after years of disorder and trouble. As Ranjit Singh’s power grew, many of the Sardars acknowledged his authority. Establishing his position in Lahore and the surrounding districts, he set out to conquer the more distant parts. One of his earliest adventures was towards Jammu. The ruler of the state gave in without a fight. Narowal, Sialkot and Dilawargarh were other places which fell to Ranjit Singh during his campaign. On Baisakhi day, 1801, Ranjit Singh was crowned as the Maharaja of the Punjab.

Ranjit Singh had won over the Kanhaiyas and Nakais by marriage and taken Lahore from the Bhangis. He made friends with the Ahluwalias, through their chief, Fateh Singh, who was invited by him to go with him to the Holy Sikh Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran. Thus, Ranjit Singh, accompanied by Fateh Singh, overran the north-west districts and annexed territories beyond the Jhelum. His next target was the important province of Multan. The governor, Nawab Muzaffar Khan, surrendered without a fight and pledged loyalty to the Sikh ruler. The Nawab of Jhang fought back, but was defeated. He laid down arms and was allowed to retain possession of his district. In 1803, at Amritsar, Ranjit Singh held a military Durbar in which he conferred ranks and honours on his nobles and generals.

Ranjit Singh had been a keen observer of the progress of the British in India and their victories over the Marathas and other Indian powers. He attributed their superiority to the exact discipline of their soldiers, and wanted to give his army the same kind of training. By his wise policy, persistent care and by example of his own courageous action and bravery, made his army powerful and efficient. He succeeded in building a strong infantry. He also employed a number of foreigners, some of whom had served as officers in Napoleonic’s army. However, as a result of Ranjit Singh’s intercession between the Marathas and the British, the Marathas got back a large part of their territory, which had come under British occupation. In 1807, Ranjit Singh annexed Kasur to his kingdom.

On September 12, 1808, T.C. Metcalfe, a young British officer, was sent to Ranjit Singh’s court with an offer of friendship. He expressed his government’s desire to have friendly relations with him and presented to Ranjit Singh the draft of a treaty. Ranjit Singh rejected the treaty and agreed to the friendship on the condition that the British

would recognize his authority over the Sikh country to the south of the Sutlej. A new treaty was presented to Ranjit Singh based on the terms first offered by the British and the proposals made by Ranjit Singh. Thus the Treaty of Amritsar was signed on April 25, 1809. It provided that the British Government would count the Lahore Durbar among the most honourable powers and would in no way interfere with the Sikh ruler’s dominions to the north of the Sutlej. Both governments pledged friendship to each other. The Treaty of Amritsar settled the southern limit of Ranjit Singh’s kingdom. Having once made up his mind to comply with the terms offered to him, Ranjit Singh lost no time in recalling his troops to the Punjab, and on April 25, 1809, the treaty was signed. It was by no means a bad bargain for the Sikh ruler; for though forced to abandon all hope of Cis-Sutlej supremacy, he had the enormous advantage of knowing that, from that time forward, he would never be called upon to defend his eastern frontier. For that his sole guarantee was the word of the British Government; but the character of the recent negotiations had taught him that that word was to be relied upon. He loyally abided by the terms of the treaty, and from the moment he signed it he became the firm and devoted friend of the paramount power. Meanwhile, the Sikh conquest of Peshawar ended the long sequence of invasions from the north-west. In 1819, Ranjit Singh made an elaborate plan to attack Kashmir which was still under Afghan control. Ranjit Singh successfully carried out his conquest of Kashmir.

The spirit of stern religious discipline and sacrifice which had supported Sikhs through a critical period of their history and led them to power and glory was dimmed in the pomp and grandeur of sovereignty. Ranjit Singh’s death, in 1839, left a deep hiatus. The Khalsa lost the leader who had by his commanding personality, foresight and tact provided a central point for their national aspirations and secured them the status of a sovereign people. The British had by then taken practically the whole of India, except the Punjab and Sind and their empire bordered on the southern confines of the Sikh State. The process of British expansion, which had temporarily been halted by the Sikhs who had built up a strong bulwark in the Punjab, was, after the death of Ranjit Singh, again

set on its inexorable course. All these factors combined to weaken the Sikh kingdom. Intrigue and murder became rampant and a tragic fate overtook the country of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The d’enouement of this pathetic drama was provided by the Anglo-Sikh wars which resulted in the annexation of the Punjab to the British dominions.\footnote{Harbans Singh, \textit{Op.cit}, p. 105.}

The British were watching the happenings in the Sikh State with more than a neighbour’s interest. They saw their opportunity in the confusion and disorder that prevailed, and, disregarding their treaties of friendship with the Sikhs, they started implementing their plans of subjugating their country. Even when Ranjit Singh as alive, symbolizing in his person the unity and glory of the Sikh’s kingdom and their desire to live in peace with their neighbours to the south of the Sutlej, the British had secretly coveted his territories.\footnote{Ibid, p. 115.}

Lord Dalhousie proclaimed annexation of the Punjab on March 29, 1849. His Foreign Secretary, Henry M. Elliot, arrived at Lahore to obtain the signatures of the members of the Council of Regency and of the minor king, Maharaja Duleep Singh.\footnote{Ibid, p. 128.} The Sikhs were deeply galled at the fall of their kingdom, but not unduly dismayed. They attributed the outcome of their contest with the British to the chance of war. They were also aware that, despite the deceitfulness of courtiers such as Gulab Singh, Lal Singh and Tej Singh, they had fought the Britishers squarely, and maintained their manly demeanour even in defeat. In this mood it was easier for them to be reconciled with the British after normalcy was restored.\footnote{Ibid, p. 129.}

As long as Maharaja Ranjit Singh was alive, the British kept their distance. They coveted the territories of the Sikh nation, but although they had conquered the rest of India, they dared not move against the mighty Ranjit Singh. After his death, the crafty British had annexed Punjab, but inspite of the treachery and betrayal of the Dogras and the Purbias, it was no easy walk for the British. They had to fight eight bloody battles against the \textit{Khalsa} army before they could annex the Sikh kingdom. The battles fought at Mudki (1845), Ferozeshahr (1845), Aliwal (1846), Sabraon (1846), Buddowal (1846),

\footnote{Ibid, p. 115.}
\footnote{Ibid, p. 128.}
\footnote{Ibid, p. 129.}
Ramnagar (1848), Chellianwala (1849) and Gujrat (1849) were the bloodiest battles the British had fought in their entire history.\(^{169}\)

By the middle of the seventeenth century the distinctive doctrine and characteristics of Sikhism had become embodied in a community whose unhappy relations with the Muslims had generated a militarist strain. Guru Gobind Singh gave the name of Singh (“Lion” or “Champion”) to his followers to signify that henceforth all should be soldiers. This was appropriate, for by the end of the eighteenth century, the Mughal Empire was disintegrating and its successors, including the Marathas and the British, vied with each other for power. It was as this crucial nexus of time that Ranjit Singh was born, in 1780, in due course emerging as the leader of the Sikhs. That the religious and military vitality of the Sikhs survived the fragmentation of the Mughal Empire is in no small measure due to this dynamic person. Quick to learn from others (especially the British, whose disciplined infantry he admired) Ranjit Singh embarked on a policy of expansion, absorbing the principalities of his fellow Sikhs and Muslim enemies: the Punjab, Kashmir and Multan fell and the Afghans of the Peshawar Valley and Trans-Indus plains acknowledged his rule. Statesman and soldier, by 1823 he ruled over a formidable empire which had been created by the best-armed military machine in Indian history. But, Ranjit Singh never achieved his aim of further enlarging his territory by conquering the Cis-Sutlej states. As early as 1808 the British prevented him from doing so. The British presence had been confirmed by the middle of the 18th century; they were to stay and thenceforth successfully proved themselves the most powerful of the successor states to the Mughal Empire. Ranjit Singh instinctively realized the danger posed by the British; however, there was no showdown in his day. He chose restraint rather than confrontation and the outcome of the Anglo-Sikh wars after his death is a commentary on the wisdom of that decision. Ranjit Singh was, in a sense, the victim of lost opportunities over which he had no control. It is doubtful if even he, with all the military skills at his disposal, could have withstood the increasing strength of Britain, with her massive resources of men, money and technology. There is reason for toying

with the idea that this great leader was born too late in the history of India to realize his full potential.\footnote{170 Hasrat Bikram Jit, \textit{Life and Times of Ranjit Singh--A Saga of Benevolent Despotism}, published by the author at Hathikhana, Nabha, Punjab, India, 1977, pp. v, vi.}

Ranjit Singh was a characteristic product of the Sikh tradition, and was also the leader, who had come to deliver the goods. Thus the emergence of the Khalsa Raj under him was neither an accident nor a freak of history. It was a unique historical phenomenon, the outcome and the flowering of a prolonged struggle for capturing political power, and must be understood in its true perspective. Bir Singh, a contemporary of Ranjit Singh, in his poetical composition, \textit{Bara Maha Guru Gobind Singh Ji Ka}, refers to the period of socio-political turmoil gone through by the peasant soldiers or the Singh\textit{s}, who had become \textit{Sardars} (rulers) with the Guru’s grace.

Ranjit Singh found the Punjab strife-ridden and chaotic, a loose confederacy of powerful misl chiefs, lacking the corporate spirit, and indulging in petty intrigues and dissensions. In the absence of a strong central authority, the State had become a prey to the Afghan invaders on the one hand and to the Maratha and the British designs on the other. Ranjit Singh brought out the \textit{Misl} chiefs into submission, fired his people with a corporate zeal and led them from victory to victory so as to galvanise a whole people with a sense of collective triumph. He rose to be the ruler of a powerful state extending from Tibet to Sind and from Khyber pass for ever, thus putting an end to the tyranny and oppression of the sub-continent. It has been acknowledged that in fulfilling his ambitions, Ranjit Singh used the barest minimum of force necessary. In Sikhism, the inward and the outward, the spiritual and the empirical, are inextricably interwoven. Ranjit Singh, thus, built his rule on religious foundations. Ranjit Singh did not proclaim Sikhism to be the State religion, nor did he make any conscious efforts to propogate his own religion. His catholicity of religious outlook was reflected in his according due respect to all religions.\footnote{171 Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, “Sikh Rule And Ranjit Singh”, \textit{Sikhism-Its Philosophy and History}, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, 1997, pp. 484-486.}

It is evident that in all aspects of its functioning and administration, Ranjit Singh’s rule was in sharp contrast to the rule, not only of his contemporaries, but also of many modern secular administrations. His rule, being a product of the Sikh tradition and
ethos, was outstandingly humane, liberal and tolerant towards his people, including his erstwhile opponents and enemies. His rule was, undoubtedly, benign and fair, and why it was so, is explained by the background of the whole-life religious thesis and ethos which conditioned and influenced it, and of which Ranjit Singh was a shining product. The phenomenon of Ranjit Singh is not just a rule of a monarch. It demonstrates very clearly the role and impact of a whole-life or *miři-piri* religion on the society of its times.172

3. SIKH HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE ISSUE OF GENDER STUDIES:

The study of the Sikh past is deeply conflicted, riven by polemics over the boundaries of the community, debates over the transformations enacted by colonialism and migration beyond India, and heated exchanges over the status of the discipline of history itself as a way of understanding Sikh community and its experiences. While Sikh studies does not possess the lengthy genealogy that characterises the study of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, does not receive the media attention afforded to Islamic studies since the Rushdie affair and lacks the financial resources and institutional support that Jewish studies enjoy in Europe and North America, it has emerged as a lively and contested academic field. A critical examination of Sikh studies highlights several fundamental intellectual and political issues, allowing us to explore the encounter between faith and scholarship, the relationship between imperialism and academic disciplines, and the fundamental epistemological questions that trouble historians.173

Sikh historiography is dominated by a series of ongoing and intense debates over important events, the veracity of key sources and the origins of certain practices. Many of these exchanges are of great intellectual and cultural significance for Sikhs, especially where the origins of Sikhism, the composition and provenance of key texts (most notably the *Guru Granth Sahib* and *Dasam Granth*), and key markers of Sikh identity (such as the ‘five Ks’ and turban (*pagri*)) are concerned. Robust exchanges over such issues absorb much of the energy of scholars working on the Sikh past and as a result there have been relatively few attempts to explore the fundamental assumptions

that shape Sikh studies. Those that do exist, typically either present a narrative of the sub-discipline’s development or explore the supposedly fundamental rifts between ‘western critical scholarship’ and understandings of the Sikh past produced from within Sikh communities.\textsuperscript{174}

McLeod, who quickly established himself as the most influential modern historian of Sikhism, introduced a new methodological rigour and interpretive strategy into the study of the Sikh past: textual criticism.\textsuperscript{175} McLeod’s textualist approach transformed understandings of Sikh history and established a new analytical framework.\textsuperscript{176} Macauliffe’s \textit{The Sikh Religion} (six volumes, 1909) created a vision of Sikh scripture and history that has remained tremendously influential within the Sikh Panth. Macauliffe insisted that Sikhism was a distinctive religion and that its history was characterised by a constant battle against Hinduism.\textsuperscript{177}

In urging a move towards a mobile and transnational history of Sikhism, Tony Ballantyne, encourages historians of Sikhism to increasingly engage with broader debates in history, anthropology, sociology and gender studies. This is not to suggest that Sikh studies should shift its focus from addressing the Panth, but rather it is a call for what we might term ‘Janus-faced’ scholarship, which is attentive both to the historical questions that interest Sikhs and the epistemological, methodological and theoretical debates that animate humanities scholarship more generally. By recovering the complex cultural traffic and diverse encounters that have moulded the Panth, such an approach is not only more in keeping with recent directions in cross-cultural historiography but also recognises that although the Panth is united by its devotion to the Gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib, Sikhs occupy diverse cultural locations and articulate a multiplicity of identities. Recognition of the cultural exchanges and hybridised social patterns borne out of the inequalities of colonialism and the upheavals of migration necessitate the creation of new historiographical visions and forms of practice. With the recent celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa and 150th anniversary of British annexation, it now

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Ibid}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Ibid}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{177} \textit{Ibid}, p. 25.
\end{flushleft}
seems a good time to begin to explore the possibilities that such an approach to the Sikh past might offer.\textsuperscript{178}

The issue of gender studies is thus a fast-emerging trend in the genre of Sikh studies in the present times. Off late, it has greatly attracted the attention of many a Sikh scholar primarily due to the versatility of research work involved and also due to the challenges it puts before the researcher. In case of Sikhism as a modern religion, the issue of gender equality and the question of women’s entitlements have become serious concerns today. The role and status of a woman was perhaps first outlined in the Sikh scripture compiled in 1604 CE. For the Sikhs, it became obligatory to treat women as equals principally and gender discrimination was not allowed. But, it has been noted that there is a dearth of writings on women in Sikhism, but an even greater paucity of the analysis of gender status within the Sikh tradition. As gender history is regarded as ‘hidden’ history, the process of defining and contextualizing gender in Sikh history have almost been ignored. Thus, in the given writings of Sikh history, the scholars have either slightly touched upon or almost entirely neglected the issue of presenting a historical analysis of women’s identity, role and status within the Sikh tradition. Only recently, a few attempts have been made in this direction during the past years. We hardly find any serious work that exclusively deals with gender reconstruction from the Sikh literature as well as the history of gender relations as they had been operating on the scene of Sikh history. Hence, the scope of the present study has been purposely confined to the reconstruction of the gender issues from the Sikh literature from 1500 to 1920 CE. The period covers different genres of the Sikh literature representing different phases of Sikh history. This uncharted field of study is likely to add a new dimension to the Sikh historiography in particular and the historiography of the Punjab in general. Moreover, it is hoped to enhance our understanding of the gender aspects of the Sikh tradition before and after the advent of the British in the Punjab. Thus, due place has to be given to the gender studies in the field of Sikh historiography. Available writings on Sikh history and religion do not deal with gender perceptions of the Sikhs. Historiography of the Sikhs

may be thus studied from the perspective of scholars dealing with Sikh history and religion in general, and gender history of the Sikhs in particular.

According to Tony Ballantyne, a critical examination of Sikh studies highlights several fundamental intellectual and political issues, allowing us to explore the encounter between faith and scholarship, the relationship between imperialism and academic disciplines and the fundamental epistemological questions that trouble historians. The Internalist scholars prioritise the internal development of Sikh ‘tradition’, rather than the broader regional, political and cultural forces that shape the community from the outside. The vision of the Sikh past emerged out of the intense struggles within the Sikh Panth, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Pamphleteers, editorialists, and social reformers forwarded conflicting visions of the boundaries of the community and the Panth’s development in the hope that by clearly defining the community’s past they would be able to cement their own vision of the community’s present and future. History writing was a crucial tool for the rival factions of the Singh Sabha movement which flourished throughout Punjab after it was initially established in Amritsar (1873) and Lahore (1879). Historical texts produced by Tat Khalsa historians rested on two narrative strategies. Firstly, they evoked ideal types, historical role models who embodied the ideals of the Khalsa. They looked back for a more distant Sikh past, a past untainted by colonialism, for proper Sikh heroes. The second key element of Tat Khalsa historical narratives was an insistence on the dangers posed by Hinduism. They strictly believed that only a return to the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib and the strict maintenance of the Rahit (Code of Conduct) would prevent Hinduism from engulfing Sikhism altogether.

This normative tradition of historical writing was consolidated in the early twentieth century by the likes of Bhai Vir Singh and after Partition it was increasingly professionalised by a new generation of scholars, most notably Ganda Singh and Harbans Singh. Both of these authors wrote what we might term ‘corrective histories’, works that challenged interpretations of Sikhism popular outside the community (such as the belief

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that Nanak’s teachings were essentially syncretistic) and disputed evidence that indicated diversity in Sikh identity and practice within the historical record. This corrective approach is most obvious in Ganda Singh’s edited collection of European accounts of Sikhism, where his glosses and footnotes not only correct European misapprehensions, but also rebut European claims that Sikhs engaged in practices that contravened the injunctions of the rahit. In the late 1960s this normative tradition faced its first serious challenge with the publication of W.H. McLeod’s Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion. He introduced a new methodological rigour and interpretive strategy into the study of the Sikh past: textual criticism.\(^{183}\)

McLeod’s textualist approach transformed understandings of Sikh history and established a new analytical framework that has been extended by a younger generation of scholars.\(^{184}\) It is possible to identify five divergent approaches to the Sikh past – the Internalist, the Khalsacentric, the Regional, the Externalist and the Diasporic.\(^{185}\) While N.G. Barrier’s work has been central in shaping our understanding of Sikh politics in the colonial era, Harjot Oberoi has produced the most sophisticated cultural analysis of social change in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Oberoi’s critics have frequently identified him as a member of a ‘McLeodian school’, failing to recognise the fundamental epistemological and methodological break that Oberoi’s work makes from the textualist tradition and McLeod’s strict empiricism.\(^{186}\)

Where the Tat Khalsa tradition developed out of an urbanized late nineteenth century Punjabi elite that was receptive towards colonial education and western disciplines, the Khalsacentric tradition repudiates the authority claims of disciplines like history, sociology, anthropology, women’ studies, and religious studies.\(^{187}\) Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, for example, has asserted that ‘a proper study of religion … is beyond the domain of Sociology, Anthropology and History’, while Sukhmander Singh has argued that ‘[m]ethodologies relevant to Christian ideology where scriptures developed as a result of history and culture, [are] inapplicable to Sikhism where scripture is revelatory

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\(^{184}\) *Ibid*, p. 6.
\(^{185}\) *Loc.cit*.
and authenticated by the prophet himself.’ It follows on from this that Sikhism can only be understood from a ‘Scriptural’ basis.188

J. S. Grewal has consistently grounded his explorations of Sikhism in the history of Punjab. Of all the historians working on Sikhism, Grewal has published the most widely on Punjabi history more generally and his research consistently foregrounds the importance of the region’s geography, its institutions and political structures, its economic fortunes and its cultural ethos. In light of this insistence, his work typically uses a broader range of sources and deploys a range of approaches, (from literary analysis to discussions of political economy) in teasing out the multi-faceted nature of Sikh history. For J.S. Grewal, Sikh history is a dynamic story of the shifting relationship between this community and its regional environment.189

Externalist Approaches: Sikh Identity as a Colonial Product; A smaller group of historians have privileged imperial power relations over regional structures as they emphasise the centrality of colonialism in the making of Sikhism.190

Popular Hinduism, Macauliffe argued, was like a ‘boa constrictor of the Indian forests….it winds round its opponents, crushes it in its fold, and finally causes it to disappear in its capacious interior.’ Sikhism was threatened with this same fate: ‘the still comparatively young religion is making a vigorous struggle for life, but its ultimate destruction is...inevitable without state support’.191

An overview of the analysis done by Tony Ballantyne of Sikh historiography does reveal the total neglect of Women’s studies in general. Most of the writings on Sikh history and tradition do not deal with gender perceptions of the Sikhs. Teja Singh and Ganda Singh in their Short History of The Sikhs (2006), occasionally refer to the role and position of women in the Sikh religion. Although the life-sketch of Guru Amardas is discussed in great details, there is a only a brief mention of the Guru’s efforts towards the prohibition of Sati and the wearing of the veil (purdah) by the women and his attempts at women’s emancipation in general. Similarly, Khushwant Singh, in his History of The Sikhs, Vol.1, 1469-1839 (2004), has given only a passing reference to the practices of

Sati and Purdah, as being vehemently opposed by the third Sikh Guru, Guru Amar Das. Piara Singh and W.Owen Cole, in their *Sikhism – Beliefs and Practices* (1999), just highlight various socio-economic evils, especially those which lowered the position of women in society. Issues like adultery, marriage rights, dress code, ethics, the concept of God as male/female are taken up and discussed in details.\(^{192}\)

Apart from this, some scholars of Sikh religion and culture too have made a few references to the gender issues in their works. Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, in his *The Sikh Culture (2002)* and *Who Are The Sikhs*, has eulogized the role of women in Sikhism. This recent work follows the same conventional approach towards the presentation of Women’s history in Sikhism. Guru attitudes are taken as the backbone to measure the degree of equality enjoyed by the Sikh women since the origin of Sikhism.\(^{193}\) Apart from scholars of religious studies, some sociologists, anthropologists and historians have shown keen interest in the recently emerging trends in the field of Sikh studies. They include W.H. McLeod, J.S. Grewal, Doris R. Jakobsh, Nikky Guninder kaur and Mohinder kaur Gill. The renowned historians of the Sikhs like W.H. McLeod and J.S. Grewal, have made very little contribution to the field of gender studies in Sikhism. Although their writings focus on the various aspects of Sikhism, they have not done any exclusive study on the Sikh women and their role and position in Sikh history and religion. McLeod in his essay on *Gender and the Sikh Panth* published in *Essays in Sikh History, Tradition and Society (2007)*, has clearly stated that gender in Sikh studies has only recently attracted the attention of scholars because so far, Sikh scholars have greatly ignored their historical development A general scarcity of women on the historical scene is notably observed by the author. Bethinking his own works over the past two decades, W.H. McLeod has forged some of his own writings, which he terms as invaluable collections addressing some major issues concerning the Sikhs. Scrutinizing the fundamental difference between historical sources and tradition, he quarries into the issue of Sikh Identity. Thereupon various facets of Sikh society like observance of caste, the place of women and wearing of the turban are explored. There is also an extensive discussion on Sikh art and literature. McLeod notes that a span of 500 years of Sikh

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history, consists almost wholly of 500 years of the doings of men. Sikh history essentially is men’s history. Even contemporary Sikh institutions today are strongly male-dominated. McLeod rakes up the question of gender within the Sikh Panth simply to raise it as a question and to evoke responses from those who are entitled to provide the answers. The essay concludes on the note that the place of women in Sikhism is favourably situated in comparison with practically all examples drawn from the western experience. He upholds this as a case in theory and largely also in practice.\(^\text{194}\)

J.S. Grewal in his *Guru Nanak and Patriarchy* (1993), discusses gender status and its role in Sikh historical perspective. Issues of Guru Nanak’s attitude towards patriarchy and its implications for the gender relationship have been discussed entirely on the basis of his own compositions in the Guru Granth Sahib. In general, Sikh scholars do assert that Guru Nanak stood for complete gender equality. In Grewal’s view, the subject of gender status and its role in Sikh historical perspective has not been explored in depth. In his “Sikhism and Gender” in *Lectures on Sikh History, Society and Culture of the Punjab* (2007), he conceptualizes gender in Sikhism as a balance between the norm of equality and the demands of a patriarchal family.\(^\text{195}\)

Doris R. Jakobsh in her *Relocating Gender in Sikh History: Transformation, Meaning and Identity* (2003), analyses the development of gender ideals under the Sikh Gurus and their adaptation and transformation by the new intellectual elite in the colonial period.\(^\text{196}\) Doris’s work is regarded as one of the first to chart the history of gender construction in Sikhism. The study views both male and female ideals and the ways in which these were informed by notions of gender in Victorian Britain. It also examines the development of novel ritual identities.\(^\text{197}\) Apart from raising pertinent questions, the study focuses mainly on the political, social and religious structures of the colonial realm,

from the perspective of gender construction. Firstly, it focuses on the Singh Sabha reform movement spearheaded by British educated Sikhs in the late 19th & early 20th centuries. The Singh Sabha reform movement, aimed at resurrecting the ‘purity’ of Sikhism as it existed during the golden age of the Guru period. These reformers armed with western education and Victorian ideals tried to reinterpret tradition, according to their own needs and visions. Secondly, it analyses the development of gender ideals under the Sikh Gurus and their adaptation. This study looks at both male and female ideals and the ways in which these were informed by notions of gender in Victorian Britain. Finally, it also examines the development of novel ritual identities, exploring the educational initiatives, meant to produce reformed Sikhs, unadulterated by popular traditions. In this way, the author challenges current understandings of the inclusion of women in the ritual formations of the Sikhs. On the whole, the work is an attempt to attract students and scholars of gender studies, the Sikh religion and South Asian colonial history, as well as general readers interested in a historical understanding of the role of women in Sikhism.

This scholarly work is a major contribution to an uncharted field of research as it attempts to pursue questions regarding the correlation between historical knowledge and gender relations on a broad scale, particularly during the era of colonization when the Singh Sabha movement came to the fore. It refers to the development of the early Sikh tradition with special reference to the gender reconstruction. In the traditional historical accounts of the Sikhs, there is little evidence that women were in any way active participants in the developing community. With reference to the intellectual developments in India and those within the social, cultural and religious milieu in Britain before and after the conquest of India, the author has clearly brought out that gender construction in Britain played an important role in policies developed in India by the British. The 19th century Victorian ideals laid emphasis on ‘manliness’. Men "were to be active in the public world, competing against each other for power and wealth, while

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women, from the sanctuary of the home were to nurture their husbands and children and to uphold society’s values”.

Doris also traces the development of Sikh religious ideology from its origin to its present day beliefs and practices. The author is also of the view that feminist historiography is based on the notion that each aspect of reality is gendered. It seeks to determine how the categories of female and male are historically constructed over time. It moves beyond a timeless, biologically determined understanding of gender to a construct that is fluid and constantly changing. With reference to the educational enterprise of the Singh Sabha movement, the author states that the Sikh reformers elucidated and in some cases modified the prevailing understandings of gender during the 19th and 20th centuries. Here, the distinct minority status of the Sikhs vis-à-vis other religious communities in Punjab is of particular importance in this discussion of gender construction. Reforms in terms of gender came to be pivotal to the discourse surrounding the power dynamics of the period. For the Sikhs, educational progress, particularly the education of females, became the common goal uniting various factions. An overview is presented regarding the missionary endeavour, Sikh orthodox tradition and reform initiatives among the Sikhs in the field of female education. She then goes on to describe the efforts of the Tat Khalsa in conducting reforms. They spread the educational ideals through the various mediums at their disposal; tracts and newspapers, which were especially utilized to spread their objectives. Education came to be intricately entwined with the upliftment of women and with the notion of nation-building.

The authoress strongly believes that gender is a fluid construct, and therefore, in essence gender constructs are evolutionary, they emerge and develop with the shifting needs of the community within which they unfold. They are also susceptible to the forces surrounding them, be these political, economic, social, or cultural. The Guru period of the Sikh community came to be transformed by its own needs and constituencies. Thus, a patriarchal value system was firmly established throughout the Guru period. With the British raj came well-defined conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity. Victorian assumptions about race, religion, gender, as well as economic and political designs, played an important role in the process of Sikh gender construction. Sikh reformist gender ideology during colonial times did not originate with the Sikhs, but largely due to the efforts of social reform organizations such as the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj.
Similarly, the ‘civilized’ dominant male construct of the Singh Sabha reform movement necessitated a ‘civilized’, educated, though secondary, female construct. The promotion of female education was adopted by women as the most effective means to enhance their position. With the ushering of a new era, began the participation of the Sikhs, both male and female, in India’s nationalist struggle against the Raj. Sikhism and Women: History, Texts and Experience, Edited by Doris, is about Sikh Women's social and religious lives and experiences.

Similarly, Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh’s The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent (1993), deals with the issue of God’s gender. Some scholars have merely eulogized the role of women in Sikhism. One such book authored by Mohinder Kaur Gill, Role and Status of Women in Sikhism (1995), represents the perspective of a Sikh woman in relation to her role and status in Sikh history and religion. Gill has tried to evolve the image of an ideal Sikh woman having complete privileged equal status to man in all aspects. Although there are references to heroic and other notable Sikh women, but no adequate substantiation has been made. A policy of religious appeasement is followed throughout the book, glorifying the efforts of the Sikh Gurus and their respective Guru Mahals. She holds these two factors as solely responsible for elevating the status and position of women in Sikhism. It is further believed that the attitude of Gurus towards women is more important than the availability of material regarding Guru Mahals. The present work is thus an insiders view—a Sikh study conducted by a Sikh woman on Sikh women.

Sociologists who have made some attempt in the area of gender studies have also contributed greatly by way of their published works. In this context, Paramjit S. Judge and Gurpreet Bal’s edited work, “Reconstructing Identities: Society through Literature”, is a collection of essays, which deal with various issues, for example, the formations of religious and gender identities in the writings of the nineteenth century

woman poet – Pero and a similar approach is adopted to reconstruct gender and religious identities from the first Punjabi novel, *Sundri*. Pruthi Raj and Bela Rani Sharma’s *Sikhism and Women (1996)*, may also be cited here. The research articles in Pruthi Raj and Bela Rani Sharma’s edited work, highlight the importance of Sikh women in the broader context. It also discusses the multi-farious aspects of Sikh faith and Sikh women. The volume partly gives the impression of being a study of the history of Sikhs and their attitudes towards women. The authors have arrived at conclusions after careful analysis of Sikh philosophy and verses of the Guru Granth Sahib on one hand and relating them to the study of gender within Sikhism on the other hand.

Some general and specific gender studies have been conducted by the scholars of Indian and World religions. For example, Jean Holmes and John Bowker, editors of *Women in Religion (1994)* deal with the part the women have played in religious institutions. It deals with what part women can and/or do play in religious institutions; how relevant religion is to their general role in society; and the significance of cultural influences for attitudes to women within the religious traditions. Addressing important issues of the day, this series examines how each of the eight major religions approaches a particular theme.

Similarly, Rajkumari Shanker in Arvind Sharma’s edited work, *Women in Indian Religions (2002)*, highlights a comparative approach to portray the position of women vis-à-vis their respective religious ideologies.

T.V. Sathyamurthy, editor of *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India (2000)*, provides an understanding of gender perspectives in the broader context of contemporary India. Gender is viewed from a political perspective. India’s struggle for independence and the constitution accorded an important place to the rights of women. But the progressive thrust of national independence was not sufficient to dispel gender blindness in India. The patriarchal and hierarchical social structures have institutionalized the subordination of women. In recent years, women have focused

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206 Pruthi Raj and Bela Rani Sharma (eds.), *Sikhism and Women*, Published by Anmol Publications, New Delhi, 1995.


attention on their position in society as a political issue, even though this has by no means led to a transformation of hidebound political practices. Gender truly cannot be seen in isolation because women carry multiple identities with them ‘as members of vertically antagonistic socio-economic groups’. Not only this, some scholars have tried to construct gender, caste and class in the colonial Punjab. **Clamping Shutters and Valorizing Women : Tensions in Sculpting Gender Identities in the Colonial Punjab**, an article by Kamlesh Mohan, published in *Punjabi Identity in a Colonial Context* (1999), focuses on recasting gender identities, roles and relations between man and woman and the ideologies of social reform movements. In the colonial Punjab, patriarchal ideology continued to dominate the perception of gender relations. In the context of reconstituting patriarchy, the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha’s model of ‘moral’ and ‘spiritual’ woman became relevant. The existing unequal gender-relations further helped in the exclusion of women from ownership or control of means of production prevalent in the pre-colonial agrarian structure. Although not directly dealing with the status of the Sikh women, the article reflects upon the general conditions prevalent in Colonial Punjab regarding the construction of gender and gender identity formation.

Anshu Malhotra’s **Gender, Caste and Religious Identities; Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab** (2002), examines the development and transformation of the caste factor and its impact on gender relations, which encouraged a re-examination of women’s role and place in society.

General articles are also being written perhaps under the influence of recent feminist or Women Liberation Movements. Many of the recent studies in the form of articles, eulogise the contributions of women in Sikhism. Alice Basarke, has authored a few articles dealing with the issues of gender in Sikhism. Her articles attempt to create an interest among historians to record ‘Women’s History’. They also stress on the importance of conducting serious, scientific research in this regard. Elsewhere, she also traces the tradition of female participation in the Panth from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh. In her opinion, even after 500 years, Sikh women are no better off than their counterparts in

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other communities. Any study on Sikh women would be largely incomplete without understanding the basic philosophy of the Sikh religion, according to Basarke.  

Prabhjot Kaur on the other hand, deals with the issue of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the global context, and believes that the modern day problems affecting today’s women can be solved by resorting to the ‘Gurmat’. She writes from a feminist perspective and goes on to list the main reasons why the women are lagging behind in the professional sector, in comparison to the men. Harveen Sachdeva Mann in her article argues that Sikhism is generally regarded as an egalitarian religion, committed to the equality of sexes, but, recent fundamental rhetoric clearly reflects the entrenchment of a dominant patriarchy and the consequent paradigmatic construction of women as dependent.

