CHAPTER VI
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IDEA OF GOD IN SIKHISM AND
HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITY

The entire Sikh outlook on divinity is wholly centered on the nature of the timeless realizing itself in specific concrete historical moments and human responses to those Historical Challenges. There was no birth of a spiritually enlightened yogic and meditative roles of God's seekers in the hoary traditions of Indian spiritualism. So much so that one of the very profound contemporary Christian philosophers 'Albert Schweitzer' in his book 'Nature of Indian Thought' (L. Allen Unwin London) has argued that the main upthrust of Indian tradition is negation of life of man in this world. It seems to suggest that it scarcely bothers about good life, moral values or fair conduct and believes in completely side stepping the obligations of humanity and propriety of fair dealings in collective conduct. According to this view the genuine seekers of Moksha must transcend all positive attributes of historic obligations and social duties. Of course, many Indian scholars have objected to this kind of wholesale condemnation of Indian thought as life negation as a Christian theologian misunderstanding of the subtle moral doctrines of karma, Sanadharma and Adhibhit that are the foundations of Hindu social organisations. Many in the past and recent times have pointed out to elaborate treatises on ancient
and medieval India giving details of various codes and canons of rightful conduct, in the light of specific attributes Sanskars as well as capacities. It is argued that each individual unlike the morality and principles argued about in the western tradition is visualised in his or her full concreteness as a acting agent, with specific obligations and capacities, one is supposed to explore by his own intellectual and spiritual insights the specific and the historical duties that form a hierarchy of duties under Pittrina, Devarina as well as Kishirina exhausting the familial religious as well as the cultural artistic and spiritual values that human beings has to strive for in order to be true to his full inner nature.

In fact it is also argued that the doctrine of categorical duties as advocated by Kant, finds ample resemblance in the precept and doctrine of Karm-yog as distinct from mere knowledge of identity of Atman with Brahman as the doctrine of Gyan-yog. Gita accordingly enjoins on man the central importance of the duty of the activist and the warrior without of course any sense of personal greed, malice or attachment (Nishkam Karm).

However, it is argued that all these please for performance of duties or enjoined by the Indian traditions only to overcome one's material involvement with the life of here and now. The Dharma that should inform all the performances of rituals of either desires or love are pursuit of power,
authority, rule of law production and collection of wealth or to serve the performance of rituals to discharge one’s obligations to one’s deed ancestors or to plecrete God’s one’s world. As such the duties and performances in this world have only meaning and value as contributions to timeless goal of Dharma and Moksha. This position concerning relative indifference to the historical and societal well being however seems to be quite neglected. For long centuries the Indian spiritual forces were too much pre-occupied with personal striving for transcendence peace and liberation. This was the age of myndicants and siddhas which after Upnishades and under the influence of Buddha and Jaina and Arhants left the world of everyday living to be the mundane persuits of the householder and only existed as parasites surviving by religious, Biksha and pufferings made by rich to the shrines on the fulfillment of their vows. All in all, the society at large was no one’s concern. Rulers and the warriors were only interested in gathering all the different territories under their rule and also possibly taking possession of the very best of the harvest of both cash and kind such as cows, elephants, horses chariots as well as all the beautiful young ladies in their own possession. Most men were made slaves to satisfy the blind passions and desires of such autocratic, dictatorial and irrational feudal classes. Poor peasants, workmen, were constantly terrorised and made to suffer indignities by the
petty mercenary administrative personnel as well as the footloose soldiers who will take possession of whatever their fancy dictated. It is well known that rulers allowed their servants to exercise unlimited power and dictatorial authority in the name of ruler sovereignty. In fact, the life of ordinary mankind of India for long periods was a tale full of back breaking labour, very meagre standard of living and very coarse and rude system of taxation and almost no civil rights. It was tyrinical often that one was forced to do physical labour in the service of local administrators without any wages, food or consideration. Many of them died because of exhaustion. The plight of women was even more despicable. They were sold and bartered by their village elders to the fancy and passions of marauders who demanded their quota of sexual exploitation and refused to provide for their own progeny that poor village communities have to support out of their own meagre resources.

No wonder, large number of human beings fled from secular occupations either joined the trail of the marauding aggressors converting themselves to the religion of the rulers of the day and expecting to be saved from indignity of the humiliation of being physically chestized or to undergo indignity of parting with their sisters, daughters and their wives to the crude and carnal demands of the armed oppressors. Others who could not stand such shame of either loss of dignity or loss of honour and their
large scale enmass conversion of fallen women and their children and their families to a little less cruel social dispensation and under Indian Islam when one’s in thirteen century sultanant of Allaudin Khilzi and Lodhis in the following century come to be dominal central authority of Delhi. After this period, all the indigenous sects were gravely terrorised and looked for a crying social reform. They were looking for some faith that could lead them loose their day to day humiliation at the hands of priests in the countrysides and at the temples and religious centres. As well as physical and economic slavery from the exploitation from the cruel political masters and their crueller minissions. This was darkness before dawn in the history of India.

While there had been some attempts at mass awakening through popular Bhagti religions as noted in our earlier chapters of Chettenya, Gyaneshwar, Tukka Ram, Ramanand, Kabir, and Ravidas was a period of 1400 to 1700 of medieval India still there was no consciousness of societal and historical appreciation of reaction to this process of collective involvement until the spiritual light of Nanak enlightened the soul of Guru Hargobind in the wake of the Martyrdom of his father Guru Arjan by under the orders of the Jahangir at Gwalior in the early 17th century. It was when Hargobind in his vision assumed the role of two swords of 'Niri' and 'Piri' i.e. Physical strength with moral and spiritual strength, but physical strength was only to be used
while combating injustice, tyranny and maltreatment in the name of religion and to provide guidance to societies in general towards historical as well as transcendental ideals of human life. It was after this that a distinctly historical role was envisaged to the 'Akal Takhat' as the intersection of the timeless spiritual piri along with the control and regulation of civil society from the occasional infractions against human dignity by the power made tyrants of the age.

Outwardly Guru Hargobind seems to have been concerned more with miri than with piri, so much so that it is said that Goswami Ram Das, Guru of the famous Indian nationalist Siva Ji put the following question to him, 'I hear that you are the successor of Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak had renounced the world while you wear the sword, keep horses and an army and people call you Sacha Patshah. What kind of Sadhu are you.' The Guru replied, 'Saintliness is within. Sovereignty is external'.

('Batfin Faqiri, Zahi amiri'.)

There is little wonder that his contemporary Bhai Gurdas felt moved to mention such criticisms in one of his Vars. He Voices the popular accusations thus:

Formerly the Gurus used to sit in the dharmsala, the present Guru does not stay in any one place. Emperors called at the residence of former Gurus,
The present Guru was imprisoned by an emperor. Formerly the disciples could not find room in the ever-crowded congregations, the present Guru leads a roving life fearing no one. Former Gurus gave consolation in sitting on a Manji. The present Guru keeps dogs and Hunds.

The former Gurus would compose hymns, listen to them and would sing; The present Gurus does not compose, listen or sing. His companions are not sikhs. He has wicked and bad people as his guides.(1)

It is this distinctive recarnation of the spirit of obligation towards the polity or sangat and not merely other worldly community humanistic spiritualism found original and a novel response in terms of secular and historical commitment to fair play to all mankind (Sarbat) as the requisite condition of any worthwhile pursuit of divine siddhi.

It was no use as Nanak himself has said to siddhas to retire to hills and forests and not to mind the concrete historical obligation of various members of one’s own community and fellow human beings and claim to have secured high spiritual status of Moksha and sach-Khand when one’s society was still under total

1. Var 26
the divine spark in a moment of high inspiration that Gobind Rai 
of Light requested his father and mentor to go and rescue oppressed Hindus of Kashmir suggesting that they tell the subedar that they will all convert to Islam if they could persuade to Guru Tegh Bahadur to embrace Islam.

After that the destiny of Sikhism was cast in the mould of martyrdom and heroism in defence of freedom of faith human dignity and personal honour. The martyrdom of Shri Guru Tegh Bahadur is seen not only as the act of a man dying resolutely for his own faith but on behalf of Hinduism and religious liberty as a principle. The view is well summed up in some verses composed by his son Gobind Rai whom he had nominated as his successor.

To preserve their right to wear their caste marks and their sacred threads,

Did he, in the dark age, perform
the supreme Sacrifice,
To help the saintly he went to the utmost limit,
He gave his head, But never cried in pain.
He suffered martyrdom for the sake
of his faith.
He lost his head but did not reveal
the secret.
He disclaimed to perform miracles or
jugglers' tricks.
For such fill men of god with Shame.
He burst the bonds of mortal clay.
And went to the abode of God.
No one hath ever performed an act
as noble as his.(2)

It was the new consciousness of Khalsa that took almost a
generation from the date of martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur at
Kotwali in Sisganj in 1675 to the day of Baisakhi at Anandpur
Sahib 1699 when first panj piyaras, who belonged to different
castes – Dayaram from Lahore in the north was of high Caste
Khatri, Sahib Chand was a barber from Bidar in the south a low
caste man, Himmat Rai a water carrier from Jagan Nath Puri in the
east, Mohkam Chand was a Washerman, Again a low Caste, From
Dwarka in the west and Bharam DAS a Jat from Delhi was the fifth
one were baptized by Khande-Pahul (nector prepared by stirring a
Khanda - two edged sword in it)which was Prepared by Mata Sundri,
Wife of Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

Guru Ji impressed the Khalsa with the belief that they were
under the special control and protection of God.

"They were taught as an article of
faith to believe that God was always
present in the general body of the
Khalsa and that wherever even five
Sikhs were assembled, the Guru would

2. Vaithar Batal

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This was a new dawn of a new religion that combined highest of spiritualism with highest of historical activism and complete commitment to justice as adumbrated in his own 'Zaffarnama,' a historical epical sent by Guru Gobind on martyrdom of his two sons at Sarhinda (Jorawar Singh and Fateh Singh) telling that no empire army could stand to the might of Dharma and all the physical force of the kingdom would eventually founder under the blast of faith and the agonised oppressed outcries of the mankind...