Guru Nanak’s revelatory experience, his prophetic utterances and vehement condemnation of the prevailing political and social evils and concern for the welfare of the downtrodden are indications of a radical and revolutionary movement for social and spiritual emancipation. He had a well-thought out plan for the development of a well-defined and systematized way of life for his followers. To reduce his compositions to mere ontology or theology would be to do injustice to his revolutionary social vision which gives equal perhaps more preference to temporal life. Sikhism, in this way, is a unique blend of the spiritual and corporate life and social emancipation is deemed a pre-requisite for human salvation. Keeping before him the ideals of fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, he envisaged an ideal society, based on ethical, conduct and social responsibility. Varna Ashrama and Karam Kand were the citadels of Brahmin orthodoxy and the false concepts of casteism and cults, purity and pollution, could be shaken only by establishing new and healthy institutions that would ultimately lead to an egalitarian social order. Sangat was the first step to give a rude
setback to Hindu casteism, the bane of the social order of the day. He debunked the idea of impurity attached to God’s creation and denounced untouchability. If the same divine spark informed every human heart, where was the justification for casteism and social inequality. The Guru says: “He that has created all, looks after it also; To Him is all known. To whom, says Nanak, shall we carry our complaint? All within the self is lodged”.

To concertise this ideal, to demolish caste distinctions and dismiss the concept of pollution. Guru Nanak called for unity on spiritual basis, where there should be no individualism and reverence for the dignity of Brahmin but rather an allegiance to a single community or its creed. Guru Nanak established the institutions of sangat and pangat and these institutions had “a wholesome and revolutionary effect upon the lives of people” for in sangat and pangat “equality and fraternity were learnt in practice and all divisions and distinctions discarded”. The Guru concretized their ideals into the institutions of sangat and pangat to “Inculcate into their disciples the ideals of corporate life, humility and equality they cherished” and that these institutions went a long way in “removing the rust of the ages
and initiated a new era"). Like the Christian concept of inherent sin, the *sudras* were impure by birth and destined to suffer from the casteist persecution. "The *sudras* were considered impure by their very birth and their impurity could not be shaken off by any means" and this "notion of inherent pollution or impurity was mainly responsible for their sufferings and making permanent the social exclusiveness against the *sudras*".

Rabindra Nath Tagore debunks this concept of inherent pollution that made Brahminism superior and enabled it to wield social and religious authority. Says Tagore: "The caste idea is not creative. It is merely institutional... It hurts the complete truth in man". So, if caste is a mere institution as Tagore asserts, then the outmoded institutions could be replaced by dynamic institutions that could bring winds of change to sweep away the old, otiose and decadent to usher in a state of society that would maintain at all costs the unity of man. Guru Nanak’s introduction of the institution of *Langar* was thus the need of the time, for to quote Max Weber, "It is one of the constitutive principles of the castes that there should be at least ritually inviolable barriers against complete commensalism among different castes". Even the mere shadow of *sudras* on the food or even the cooking pot of a Brahmin would oblige the latter to throw it away for having been
defiled. Hutton rightly concludes that the commensal taboos are the corner stone of the caste organization.

Guru Nanak's establishment of *Langar* with *Sangat* thus proved revolutionary in those times when spiritual cant and religious hypocrisy of the Brahmins tarnished the spiritual image of the Indian culture. Max Weber opines, "There were only two alternatives before the anti-caste movements; either to abolish the caste system or to be engulfed by it." As it was difficult for Guru Nanak to abolish it in his lifetime, he formed a society outside the caste system. Thus he realized that there could be no social revolution in India without a frontal attack on the caste system which crippled human dignity and formed a dyke against spiritual regeneration through direct approach to God. Guru Nanak made this frontal attack by creating the institution of *Langar* that led to the spiritual regeneration of the common man. The institution of *Guru Ka Langar* was started by Guru Nanak, "for the purpose of teaching service, spreading equality and removing untouchability and other prejudices born of the caste system." So great was the spirit of this institution that every Sikh's house is deemed as *Guru Ka Langar*, for he is enjoined to share his food with whosoever graces his household, and thus a kind of *Dharmsal* for the weary to stretch his limbs. The tradition goes how later on the *masands* would visit devout Sikh...
households and demand, on the basis of authority vested by the Guru, sometimes even the things beyond the humble Sikh’s pale.

The main objective of the *Langar* was thus to introduce equality among the people who were torn apart by invidious man-made distinctions. “Men were not ... in principle equal, but for ever unequal¹¹”. Guru Nanak upheld the theory of complete equality in society. He says: “Know all human beings to be repositories of divine light, stop not to enquire about their caste, in the hereafter there are no castes¹²”. Faith in the unity of God was of prime social value. He listens to every one and is directly approachable. Guru Nanak declared: “All before Him are alike, none high or low¹³”. The tenth master endorses the same view when he exhorts his Sikhs to treat all mankind as one. Guru Nanak employs the simile of the potter and the clay to emphasize equality in diversity: “The whole universe from the same clay has appeared. The potter, however, in numerous forms makes the vessels¹⁴”.

To Guru Nanak, the purity of heart and the cult of task were of prime importance. “Forgetting the Lord” tantamounted to deserve the lowest rung on the social ladder. Bringing home the significance of the introduction of *Langar* as a great leveller, Bhai Gurdas said: “Thus Guru adopted the system of *langar* to eradicate caste prejudice and
untouchability. The gursikhs of all the four varnas recite jointly and listen to the unstruck melody... Gursikh going beyond all varnas follows the philosophy of naam. According to Fauja Singh, the institution of langar started by Guru Nanak served a four-fold function:

First, it imparted a secular dimension to sangat. Secondly, it added to the functional efficiency of the Sikh organization. Thirdly, it translated the principle of equality into practice, making it obligatory for all people, whatever their status in life, to sit on the ground and eat together. Fourthly, it served as a cementing force among the followers of Sikhism.

Dan and sewa comprise the cardinal principles in the Sikh ethos. A gurmukh is enjoined to willingly contribute a mite of his honest toil for the Langar and should visit it to perform sewa like drawing the water out of the well, hewing the wood for the hearth, cleaning the utensils and extending help to the organizers in all other chores associated with cooking and serving the meals to the sangat." It offers an opportunity to social service and gives a practical lesson to the Sikhs to see that every one should be provided with food and no one should starve. "From the very outset", the institution of Sangat was integrally associated with that of pangat or common mess."
Voluntary contributions of Sangat by way of grains, pulses and money enabled the organizers to run the Langar smoothly. Thus Guru channelized the charity for the common good of man. In many of her hukamnamas, Mata Sundri wrote to the Sangats for contribution so that she could smoothly run the Langar for the people who come to pay obeisances at the place of worship19.

The underlying notion of Langar is the belief that God’s bounty belongs to all. Its purpose was also to remove professional restriction on low castes, for the Hindu caste system insisted on the economic apartheid and a member belonging to one caste was not allowed to adopt the profession of another caste. This restriction led to the unequal distribution of wealth. The sudras were obliged to subsist on the left overs of the other castes, for they could not even earn their own bread by honest toil. Guru Nanak said, “those that eat the bread of their labour and give away something in charity, truly recognize the way20”. Since Sikhism repudiated caste system and reorganized all men as equal, everyone had the right to eat in the Langar and contribute his mite towards its provisions out of his honest toil. Sewa brought humility: Guru Nanak asserted that, “only through devoted service in this world may one find a resting place at the divine portals21”. Bhai Gurdas also says: “Guru’s Sikhs should serve the others, only by
serving, one can attain happiness’ and “one should cultivate humility and share one’s food with others”. The institution of Langar strengthened the development of a new social structure in which dignity of labour was promoted and the individual’s responsibility to contribute to social welfare was emphasized. The institution of Langar provided an opportunity to earn one’s livelihood with honest means: “first deserve, then desire and to produce community interest and to create a sense of social obligation”.

Sewa is one of the basic institutions of Sikhism and considered a cardinal virtue. Here stress was laid on the need of man’s duty towards man in order to achieve an associated, harmonious living of all men, and man’s duty towards the Guru and God to fulfil his desires, aspirations and to bring the feeling of humility and to efface ego. Thus sewa brings completion and fulfilment to the spiritual life. Guru says: “Without service are no objectives fulfilled; In service lies the purest action”. It is an established fact that all the people irrespective of social distinction or status perform service and humble manual labour. So sewa is necessary to attain a state of humility – a pre-requisite to spiritual realization.

The welfare of mankind, temporal and spiritual, seems to be the primary concern of Sikh gurus. Here religion consists in realizing God
mainly through service done within the world, where man has constantly to deal with man to promote each other’s good. If a section of society becomes poor, it is the duty of the ruler and other members of the society to see that none remains naked and hungry. Guru says: “One should serve mankind in this world for a better life in the next.” Again: “Service of the people is supreme.” Again: “One should go on serving till the last breath, only then one can meet the Lord.” So the aim of religion is to serve mankind and imbibe the spirit of love and compassion. Guru established dharamsals which served as laboratories for teaching the practice to serve for which the real field is the world.

The Sikhs were asked to share their earnings to provide food and clothing to the needy and also to nurse the sick and the wounded. Guru says: “Those that eat the bread of their labour and give away something in charity truly recognize the way.” Bhai Gurdas says: “Gursikh should serve another, only by serving one can attain happiness. One should cultivate humility and share one’s food with others.” It was considered the highest virtue to provide money for charity. By doing this, a Sikh will be fulfilling social obligations. To give donation for the relief work and to support the efforts of humanitarian institutions and pursuits man could balance the economic activity. The
contribution given by Sikhs should be used for altruistic purposes for the benefit of community. Guru Gobind Singh says: “He who serves my people, pleases me. Nothing else is pleasing to my mind. Offer gifts to them if you may, for no one else is worthy to receive them." Guru again says: “God’s bounty belongs to all but men grab it." So Guru was against the money to be accumulated. He says: “Those who hoard it - vast multitudes of wealth are lost; many for it are dishonoured; without sin is it not accumulated; in death it accompanies not man." Thus money should liberally be distributed among the needy, handicapped, destitute and people who were affected by natural calamities. This is considered one of the important aspect of sewa.

The service should be selfless, as only with the spirit and practice of selfless service, one cleanses one’s mind of haumai, lust, vanity, ego, anger and pride. Thus a Sikh achieves success and becomes useful member of society working for its good and advancement. Guru says: “Service under compulsion is of no avail, one should serve others ungrudgingly and with pleasure." Again: “One can get happiness only with the selfless service." It is the matter of history that the Gurus - Angad Dev, Amar Das and Ram Das became gurus only through selfless service to their masters. The Gurus
themselves have solicited God to grant them the gift of the humblest service, such as waving the fan over God's creation to keep it cool, to draw water and such other tasks. In devotion prays the fourth Guru, "May I wave the fan and draw water; And eat of whatever thou dost grant". Again, Guru Arjan says: "I pray to God, bless me with the company of the Gursikhs, so that I may serve them by fanning, fetching water for them, serving food for them. So service is necessary ingredient to control the ego and other passions and to relieve the suffering humanity through charity.

The service of the Guru is equally essential in Sikhism. In attaining true salvation and merging of his soul in the Supreme Being, a devotee must put himself in the service of the true Guru. Guru's service consists of two aspects: physical and spiritual. Guru says: "With devotion and singleness of mind serve I the holy preceptor - service of the holy preceptor find treasure of devotion". Again he says: "Serve the Lord in whose service no dearth shall thou feel; And consuming and spending of this wealth, in joy and bliss shall life be passed."

The true service of the Guru is also to obey the dictates of the Guru, which guides us to follow the path shown by Him, to destroy one's ego and to meditate on the Name. Guru says: "The holy
preceptors injunction shall I accept in spirit of egolessness; True
devotion and service lie in Name being lodged in heart\(^40\). So the Sikh
should obey the orders of the Guru and abide by His Will. The Guru
says: “The holy action of a \textit{yogi} in service of the master,
contemplating of the word and subduing egoism is life\(^41\).” Again: “I
have learnt by the light given by the Master, perfectly – endowed;
Recluse, hero, celibate or \textit{sanyasi} – None may expect to earn merit
without devoted service – service in which lies the essence of
purity\(^42\).”

The will of God must also be accepted. The Guru says: “The holy
preceptor’s service lies in obeying His will. By discarding the ego with
the holy preceptor one finds union. And in poise remains absorbed\(^43\).”
The duty of the Sikh is to go on repeating and remembering the
teachings of the Guru and follow his advice. Only then he can attain
peace of mind and vanish ego and the name of God will come to reside
within ones mind.

\textit{Sewa} is also necessary to fulfil the objectives and desires. The
Guru says: “All created beings are Thine own, without service is no
one’s life fruitful\(^44\). Thus \textit{sewa} is a beneficial action through which
Guru prepared men for participation in a life of service and
contemplation.
The first Red Cross service was also introduced by Guru Gobind Singh. There is an example of Bhai Kanahiya who was entrusted with the duty of giving water to the fighters in the battlefield, who served water to all without making any distinction between friend and enemy. In practice he followed the command of the Guru. "Bisar gai sabh tatt parai, jan te sadh sangat mahe pa\textsuperscript{a5}\textsuperscript{h}, and "Manas ki jaat sabhe ek pehchanbo\textsuperscript{a6}". Later on, Guru also asked him to provide medicines to the wounded soldiers. So sewa is not limited to cleanliness of premises, serving in langar or upkeep of custody of shoes but cover wider aspects of life.

III

Langar in fact is the concretization of the Sikh ideal of kirat karo, naam japo, wand chhako. Earning one's livelihood by humble and honest means is the true commerce of life. The day the young Nanak spent money to feed the hungry sadhus, the foundation of this great institution was laid. This incident, is known as "sacha sauda" in Sikh history. The whole-hearted generosity is the hallmark of this institution. Janam Sakhis are full of accounts, especially Guru Nanak’s dealings with people when he looked after Modikhana at Sultanpur. Man does not live to eat and with simple and coarse fare he can save enough for
others. So great became this institution in the due course of time that today it invariably formed a part of every Gurdwara where the hungry can satiate their hunger and can seek repose to overcome their weariness. It is said that “almost all the Dharmsalas found located on or near the highways also set up Langars and caravan serais. Both the Langar and caravan serais... formed an essential feature where hospitality and food were freely available to the visitors47”.

Though Langar was not an altogether novel idea, yet Guru Nanak’s adoption of it was unique, for it had metaphysical, ethical and social implications. In Vedic texts it is known as pakshala. In Atharva Veda we find a reference to common kitchen and the injunction according to Kapoor Singh, is “Identical shall be your drink; in common shall be your share of food48”. Monastic orders in Buddhism and Jainism had a common kitchen. Similarly, in Christian fraternities, monasteries and convents the inmates shared a common kitchen. In Sufism, the open kitchen became a part of the Khanqah. Some of the Hindu Shaivite saints also started the practice of a common kitchen.

But the Langar introduced by Guru Nanak was unique in all respects. It was not a ceremonial meal to be observed on festival days. It was a regular affair. Moreover, it was open to one and all, irrespective of caste and creed, birth and breed. Doors of Nanak’s
House remain open to whosoever seeks succour and none shall return disappointed. It was not an occasional ‘love feast’, but was a regular feature of congregational activity of the Sikhs. This single step alone was determinative in cutting the proselytes away from the caste order because the violation of commensal barriers was not a breach of an ordinary principle of caste, but as noted by Weber, “a constitutive part of it”. Langar has provided avenues for service (sewa) and has also given a practical demonstration of equality, hospitality and love for fellow beings and that is why it still remains a distinctive feature of the Sikh way of life. Since everything belongs to God who showers His bounties on one and all, according to their past actions, it is the religious duty of a Sikh to share his wealth and provisions with others. Malcolm rightly says that: “A Sikh was told that whatever he received from God, it was his duty to share it with others because the provisions belonged to the Guru⁴⁹”.

IV

The institution of Langar introduced by Guru Nanak was zealously guarded by his successors and saw to it that its smooth running would cement the bonds of kinship of the kindered souls. Guru Angad took keen interest in Langar and enlarged and extended it at
Khadoor Sahib. He had had first hand experience of running it under the stewardship of its pioneer at Kartarpur where he used to bring provisions for Langar and also helped Guru Nanak in tilling the land. He followed the same pattern at Khadoor Sahib. “At nine in the morning all visitors sat in a line without distinction. The food was served to them”. Of course, it was incumbent upon every Sikh to contribute in cash or kind towards the Langar and by participating in its preparation and distribution among the Sangat. Guru Angad’s consort took keen interest in the preparation of food in the Langar and “supplied delicious dishes like rice prepared in milk (kheer) and ghee”. The Guru, however, lived on coarse food earned by him by twisting the strings of munj for weaving the cots. Satta and Balwand, the bards in the Guru’s court, sang praises of Mata Khivi for the preparation of delicious dishes in the Langar: “Mata Khivi, a noble soul, was like a tree with shades of thick leaves. In her kitchen was distributed rich fare, kheer enriched with ghee, tasting like amrit”.

Guru Amar Das consolidated it further, for he knew its importance as an instrument of social cohesion and solidarity. It was a useful vehicle of reforms to enthuse the resurgent community to devote towards the welfare of others. The basic principle behind this institution was the keen endeavour to foster a spirit of egalitarianism.
since all were obliged to sit in pangat to partake food in the Langar. The third Nanak’s mandate was: first pangat and then sangat. The institution of Langar became an integrated and regular feature of Sikhism during Guru Amar Das. In this way, one has to accept his hospitality by eating with his disciples. The Guru would grant audience to the visitor, however, august he may be only after he had taken food in Guru ka Langar. Akbar was so impressed that he expressed his desire to grant land to the Langar for its smooth functioning. Even Raja of Haripur had to sit in the Langar and eat with others before he could be admitted to the presence of the Guru. These examples show that in the Langar all were treated at the same footing. “It serves to show the universal application of the principle of commensality and proved a right step towards egalitarianism”.

Guru Ram Das took up this noble task with rare devotion. Like his master, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das also earned his bread by selling boiled lentils and gave away one-fourth of his earnings in charity. He appointed masands in far-flung areas to spread Guru Nanak’s message and collect offerings to meet the ever-increasing demands of Langar. He reviewed the dwindling Langars at Kartarpur and Khadoor and well maintained at Amritsar. According to M.A. Macauliffe, “The Sikh devotees rendered enthusiastic help by
providing both money and free labour and that helped the Guru to make a big success of the *Langar* at Amritsar\(^54\).

Guru Arjan whose editorial skill and organizational ability are legendary, consolidated the *masand* system to ensure proper and regular supply of provisions to *Langars* under his supervision in the newly established *Dharmasals* at Tarn Taran, Kartarpur and Hargobindpur. Moreover, since Amritsar had acquired the status of the central Sikh place of pilgrimage, *Sangats* would come from far and near to see the Guru and Harmandir and the *Langar* became demanding. Guru Arjan not only strengthened the organization of the *masands*, he also made *daswandh* obligatory on all Sikhs. Every Sikh was enjoined to contribute one-tenth (*daswandh*) of his earnings towards the Guru’s coffer. The obligatory contributions to the common pool to run *Langar* became the responsibility of the Sikh community. “The institution of *Langar* towards the end of the sixteenth century became a well developed religious institution of the Sikhs based on the ethical code... and its maintenance became the responsibility of the entire Sikh community\(^55\).

This sense of belonging and commitment to a noble cause forged the Sikhs into a well-integrated community under the loving care of their Gurus who had set up high standards of ethical conduct to create
an ideal man. Guru Nanak and his successors stressed honest toil. He says: "He alone, O'Nanak, knoweth the way who earneth with the sweat of his brow and then shareth with others\(^{56}\)." Guru Arjan too dilates on the significance of \textit{Langar}: "Making an earnest effort leave thou whole earning, abide thou in joy. Contemplating the Lord, meet thou Him, and thy anxiety is dispelled\(^{57}\)." Bhai Gurdas echoes his Master: "The Sikhs should serve one another. Only by serving others, one can attain happiness. One should cultivate selfless devotion and share one's food with others\(^{58}\)." Guru and his wife Mata Ganga set personal examples by serving in the \textit{Langar} and also by sitting with people to take food. Bhai Gurdas refers to the rising popularity of Guru Arjan and the significance of \textit{Langar}: "Arjan conquered all the four directions and the Sikh devotees came to him in large number. The free kitchen runs unabated where the word of Guru is served. This is the perfect creation of the perfect Guru\(^{59}\)."

Guru Hargobind maintained an army and established \textit{Langars} at Hargobindpur and Kartarpur to meet the needs of his retinue and the \textit{Sangat}. He also sent Sikhs to other places to establish \textit{Langar}. Bhai Gonda was sent to Kabul by Guru Har Rai, where the Sikh Gurus had a sizable following, to set up a \textit{Langar} and look after its maintenance\(^{60}\). Guru Harkishan is known in the Sikh annals for his selfless \textit{sewa} of the
people smitten with small pox at Delhi. He established the Langar to feed the destitute and a dispensary to heal the Sikhs.

Guru Teg Bahadur, during his itineraries wherever he stayed, he set up langars. In numerous hukamnamas written to Sangats he exhorted them to set up langars. His son, the Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh established langars at Paonta Sahib and Anandpur, the seat of Sikh authority. He not only asked his chosen disciples to establish Langars, but would also visit the place in cognito to see their working. The Sikh annals state how once he visited all langars in disguise and ultimately declared that the langar run by Bhai Nand Lal was the best. Moreover, the langar now was given a different connotation according to the exigencies of times. It was known as degh which formed association with tegh, just as sangat went with pangat.

V

Degh, a Persian word, is often employed in Sikh theology and had material and metaphysical implications. Literally speaking, it is a large pot, a kind of cauldron to cook food in large quantity. Symbolically, it stands for social cohesion and fraternal commitment, for the food cooked in it is shared by like-minded members of a community. Guru Nanak uses the term to denote the infinite generosity
of the Benevolent Lord who created the earth that "sustains and nourishes" all creatures living on it. Guru says: “The earth is the cauldron from which a portion to each is assigned once for all; Destiny is Thy dispenser of largesse".

J.D. Cunningham also brings out its metaphorical significance: "Vessel for food, and thence, metaphorically abundance on earth, and grace on the part of God". Though it is often employed for krah-parsad which is distributed to the Sangat after ardas in any function where the Guru Granth Sahib is present, the term was employed for Langar because it had martial association during the period of the Tenth Master. Harbans Singh rightly says: “During the days of the Tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh, the term was commonly used for langar". The Sikh slogan of the Khalsa was “Degh Tegh Fateh” and this kept the Panth in invincible optimism called Charh-di-Kala.

Sikhism gives a due recognition to the human body. Opposed to asceticism, it recognizes its claims, for in it dwells the Lord. An empty belly can ill-afford to meditate or engage in any manual task. The Guru says: “Some live on herbs and root vegetables, and in forests take their abode. Some in ochre robes in a state of renunciation go about: yet within have they excessive desire, seeking to get from others clothing and food". Though man lives not to eat, the maintenance of
this five element frame is man’s primary duty, for it is a great boon of the Almighty. Moreover, saint-soldiers who were ever-ready to be in the saddle to wield the _tegh_ to protect _Dharma_ were expected to be healthy and strong. It was for this purpose that the Tenth Master took special care that the _Langars_ run by Sikhs at Anandpur remained in perfect order. Guru Gobind Singh often remarked that if any Sikh refused food to any needy person, it would tantamount refusal of food to the Guru. According to Macauliffe, the Tenth Master would say that “Whosoever uttered ill remarks against the value of _Langar_ would invite curse on himself, and no one should object on the ground of caste prejudice”. At the same time, contribution to the _langar_ should not lead to pride, for it was an institution based on the principles of humility and service or _sewa_. Professor Puran Singh called it ‘temple of bread’ as complimentary to ‘temple of worship’. He says: “The bread and water were ready for all at all hours of the day, and crowds came and freely partook of the Gurus gifts. All came were filled from the Guru’s treasury of thought and love and power; the diseased and distressed were healed by him”.

Guru Gobind Singh before his departure for the heavenly abode directed his nearest Sikh, Bhai Santokh Singh “Not to erect any monument in his memory... but to continue the tradition of _Degh_ and
accept offerings from his devotees for that purpose. After Guru Gobind Singh his consort Mata Sahib Kaur used to issue hukamnamas to Sangats for the collection of daswandh for Guru Ka Langar.

Since the temporal and the transcendental meet in Sikhism, the stress is on honest living and sharing the fruit with others. Guru Nanak rejected the Brahmins, Naths, and Siddhas as parasites of society, for they lived on the earnings of others. Sikhism recognizes the dignity of labour and regards no profession mean or low. Kirat, Naam and Wand Chhakna form its principle ethical postulates. A.C. Banerjee rightly says: “The system (langar) represented two important points in Guru Nanak’s teachings: The denunciation of asceticism and the importance of daan, the charitable sharing of money or goods.” In the context of the social conditions, prevailing in his age, Guru Nanak’s stress on honest labour and social salvation was a revolutionary concept of the duties of man and led to the development of a society dedicated to work, fully conscious of personal and social responsibilities and anxious to reconcile service to man with service to God. Guru’s house became a centre not only for providing food to the Sikhs but a feeding centre of Master’s word. Whatever was donated by the Sikhs was consumed and distributed in charity among the disciples and there never was any dearth of provisions. So, charity became the basic
principle of Sikhism as Guru Gobind Singh also said, "There is nothing equal to the bestowal of food, Blest is the man who giveth to the really hungry... Charity is of all gifts the greatest, for it saveth life." Radha Kamal Mukherjee recognizes the intrinsic value of *Langar* which has fostered “a spirit of charity on a large scale and also became a powerful binding force." All the four castes were converted into one caste of humanity, where prince was equal to poor man, says Bhai Gurdas. It did away with the caste system and false concept of purity and pollution. Moreover, it engenders the spirit of humility and *sewa*. Guru Nanak upholds the principle that the service of God lies in the service of humanity.

The institution of *langar* had grown into an essential accomplishment of the Sikh gurdwaras by the eighteenth century. It became a well-developed religious institution of the Sikhs based on their ethics. Its maintenance became the responsibility of the entire Sikh community. It was open to all and every one was expected to take part in it. It broke the barriers of casteism; and brought the feeling of unity and fraternization among the Sikhs. As Bhai Gurdas says: “The four castes were made one and castes and outcastes were regarded as noble." It cut at the root of the evil of caste, class and religious distinction and “shook the very foundation of Hindu caste system and
Muslim social arrogance\textsuperscript{75}. Thus demolished the idea of pollution of food by the mere presence of an untouchable.

It brought an egalitarian principle which helps them to separate themselves from the caste ideology and caste society. It lays down the secure foundation on which tradition of liberal democracy may be reared and a superstructure of an egalitarian society may be raised. “If this institution of \textit{langar} had been extended to all the Hindu temples and mosques in India, on the pattern of Sikh \textit{langar}, there would not have been any Harijan problem\textsuperscript{76}.

It strengthened the trend towards a development of new social structure, in which spirit of social welfare was developed and thus destroyed the narrow selfishness among men. The institution of \textit{daswandh} became an essential and permanent feature, which prepared people to promote the welfare of others by sharing their income. This society later on imparted vitality to political life and civic consciousness in India. Puran Singh says, the idea of \textit{langar} inevitably brings in mind the concept of democracy and socialism associated with the Guru\textsuperscript{77}.

The institution of \textit{langar} thus proved a revolutionary step in effacing caste distinction and advocating the adoption of any profession to earn honest living and sharing it with others and perform
sewa in the langar meant the service of the Lord. The Langar became an inseparable part of the Sikh’s corporate life and forms an important part of every place of Sikh worship. Thus, the principle of universal brotherhood, collective effort and concern for the needy, was given a practical shape through langar.
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29Ibid., Raga Sarang, Mohalla 1, p. 1245.

30Gurdas, Bhai, Var 20, Pauri 10.

31Gobind Singh, Guru, In Praise of Khalsa, Thus Spake the Tenth Master, English translation Gopal Singh, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1978, p. 141.

32S.G.G.S., Raga Ramkali, Mohalla 5, p. 889.
33 Ibid., Raga Asa, Mohalla 1, p. 417.
34 Ibid., Raga Suhi, Mohalla 2, p. 787.
36 Ibid., Raga Suhi, Mohalla 4, p. 757.
37 Ibid., Raga Suhi, Mohalla 5, p. 749.
38 Ibid., Sri Raga, Mohalla 1, p. 26.
39 Ibid., Raga Suhi, Mohalla 5, p. 743.
40 Ibid., Sri Raga, Mohalla 3, p. 34.
41 Ibid., Raga Gauri, Mohalla 1, p. 223.
42 Ibid., Raga Maru, Mohalla 1, p. 992.
43 Ibid., Raga Sarang, Mohalla 4, p. 1246.
44 Ibid., Raga Asa, Mohalla 1, p. 354.
45 Ibid., Raga Kanara, Mohalla 5, p. 1299

51 S.G.G.S., Raga Ramkali, Balwand and Satta, p. 968.

52 Ibid., Raga Ramkali, Balwand and Satta, p. 967.


56 S.G.G.S., Raga Sarang, Mohalla 1, p. 1245.

57 Ibid., Raga Gujri, Mohalla 5, p. 522.

58 Gurdas, Bhai, Var 20, Pauri 10.

59 Ibid., Var 24, Pauri 20.


62 S.G.G.S., Raga Basantu, Mohalla 1, p. 1190.


65 S.G.G.S., Raga Majh, Mohalla 1, p. 140.


73 Gurdas, Bhai, Var 1, Pauri 23.

74 Ibid., Var 1, Pauri 25.

