CHAPTER VI
NON-VIOLENCE IN SIKHISM

Sikhism is one of the most prominent, if not the only, surviving link of the several Bhakti movements that made their appearance in various parts India during the medieval period. That it has stood the test of time, whereas most of the other contemporaneous movements have practically, vanished, is, however, not a mere accident of history, and may be explained by three important factors. The first among them is the establishment of suitable institutions. The beginning in this respect was made by Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. After him, the process was ably carried forward by his nine successors, and gradually the Sikhs came to have a network of institutions which proved useful in more than one way. They provided an effective functional organization for the propagation and spread of the creed; symbolized the essential character of the Sikh movement; institutionalized the fundamentals of its teachings and made them easier to be imprinted on the minds of the devotees, They also imparted to it a hallmark of distinction and thereby smoothed the way for the development of its separate identity. ¹ None of the other movements that grew up during the medieval period was able to attain much success in the sphere of institutionalization.

Secondly, the firm social commitment of the Sikh movement prevented it from developing into a mere order of mystics. From the very first, no value was attached to renunciation of worldly life. Rather, all those who practiced it, such as the Yogis and the Siddhas, were condemned as shirkers of responsibility towards the people. ² The Sikh Gurus and their followers lived among the common people performing the routine duties of life, and never shrank from the obligations which were enjoined upon them as members of the society, no matter whether their character was religious, or social or political. In consequence, there developed a close identification between the movement and a large section of the people who realized the importance of its social purpose, and were ready to make any sacrifice for its sake.

The third factor making for the continuity of Sikhism was the powerful social

² Ibid.p.2.
backing that it received from the business and agricultural classes of the then society.\(^3\)

With the revival of Indian trade with the countries of the north-west during the fifteenth century and later, particularly after the establishment of the Mughal Empire when the fear of invasions from Central Asia no longer existed, the trading community of the region acquired a measure of prosperity and social importance which created new urges in the minds of its members. As traders, they travelled widely and mostly, or almost always, in countries inhabited by the Muhammadans. Their contact with the Muslim community was rendered closer by the fact that such of the Hindus as occupied administrative positions, ran provision stores, supplied the requirements of troops in camps or under march, and advanced money on credit to rulers, officials and other important people, were usually drawn from the ranks of the same category of people. The type of vocations they chose for themselves, their mobility and their frequent contacts with people from other areas made their general outlook broad, elastic and progressive. They possessed intelligence, knowledge, and were not opposed to the readjustment of their values in the light of the new developments since the advent of Islam in India. Their economic interests, too, pointed to the necessity of a readjustment in the relations between the Hindus and Muslim communities. They were not like the Brahmins who opposed all change and directed all their energies towards erecting high barriers between the Hindus and the Muslims; nor were they like the Yogis and Siddhas who had developed an escapist attitude towards life, and had no worthwhile interest in the problems of society. On the contrary, they were well posted with the realities of the situation, and were not opposed to change, provided it was aimed at purifying the Hindu society of its excrescences and bringing about a better understanding between the communities. They were too intelligent to be beguiled by the religious orthodoxy of the Brahmins.

At the same time, they were too firmly entrenched in the Hindu culture to be persuaded to embrace Islam. It was at this psychological moment in history that Sikhism appeared on the scene. In its teachings they found exactly what they sought and consequently, lent their powerful support to the Sikh movement imparting to it the character of an urban or town-based movement. The immense financial resources of these classes proved a great asset to it, particularly during the initial period. Gradually, the agricultural classes also came in. Their joining the movement was facilitated

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\(^{3}\) Ibid.

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partly by the hold that the commercial classes had on the cultivating classes, and partly by the eagerness of the Gurus to enroll them in the ranks of their followers in view of the impending conflict with the Mughal Government. But the main reason that they came into the fold of Sikhism in such large numbers was that this new religion, with its principle of equality held out to them the alluring prospects of elevation in the social hierarchy. Being mostly immigrants from Central Asia, they stood at the bottom of the Hindu society and they knew that so long as they remained Hindus, the rigidity of the caste system would not admit of any chance of improvement in their social status. Some of them had embraced Islam and achieved a better status, but there were still many of them who felt chary of taking that step. For such people Sikhism offered an ideal and, as it were, the long sought-after opportunity to improve their position in the society.

Originated with Guru Nanak Sikhism was followed by a continuous line of nine successors who for about two centuries guided its destiny. The line the Gurus ended with the death of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708.

The fundamentals of Sikhism were laid down by the first of the line, Guru Nanak. His concept of the Supreme Being was of a universal, all-embracing, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-merciful and ever-kind Father-God. He regarded all prophets and *avatars*, all *rishis* and *munis*, all *sidhs* and *sadhs*, all *budhs* and *naths* all *pirs* and sheikhs as His creation, executing His commission. All people, therefore, irrespective of their caste, creed, colour, clime and sex, were united in being the creation of one and the same Father-God. Guru Nanak recognized no distinction between the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the ruler and the subject. He equated the low-caste Sudra with the high-caste Brahmin and the subject non-Muslim with the ruling Muslim. He wanted social harmony to replace social rivalry and hatred, and social unity to take the place of social disunity. But the unity he cherished was unity in diversity. He did not support, much less advocate, the merger of all cultures into a single monolithic whole. On the contrary, he had no approbation for such of his people as blindly imitated the rulers in their habits of food, dress and language. To him the rituals that masqueraded as religion were meaningless, rather wasteful. Even religious symbols carried no sense if they failed to convey what they

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4 Asa Di Var, Adi Granth p.472.
stood for. What mattered, he stressed, was the purity of mind and the sincerity of purpose, and the worship lacking in these qualities was mechanical, formalistic, and hence futile. He denounced the escapist yogis and siddhas as parasites and runaways from social responsibilities. He was all praise for those who lived in the society and faced the problems of life courageously. But living in the society, whatever be its importance, was by itself not enough. He set the greatest score by the integrity of conduct one displayed in one's dealings with fellow-creatures. He was of the view that unless the basis of this conduct was spiritual and had moral values, such as truthfulness, honesty, love, humility, forgiveness, charitableness, self-control, courage, contentment, etc., there could be no sure foundations for peace, harmony and happiness in the society. He held truth very high, but truthful living was rated the highest. Encroachment on other peoples rights was considered an evil and was strictly forbidden. Guru Nanak was well conscious of the special role of leadership in maintaining the society in a sound state of health, and was severely critical of the kings, brahmins and qazis who, in one way or the other, had strayed from their proper functions.

For the dissemination of his precepts and ideas, Guru Nanak undertook long tours both in and outside India, visited prominent centres of Hinduism and Islam, and had detailed discussions with the so-called leaders of the various religious and Social orders. To his precept he added the personal example of an ideal life. Himself a caste-Bedi Khatri, he had the Muhammadan Mardana as his life-companion, the low-caste Lalo among the best of his followers, and the Muslim Sufi Pir of Pakpattan among the most intimate of his friends. At Kartarpur where he finally settled down with the members of his family, he look to agriculture for a living, and attracted to his congregations numerous people, irrespective of caste and creed.

Besides the fundamental principles of Sikhism, some of its basic institutions may also be traced back to the period of Guru Nanak. The head of the movement, the Guru, was assigned a pivotal position in the entire scheme of reform. He was regarded as far more scintillating than even a hundred moons and a thousand suns, as one who

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1 Var Sarang, Adi Granth p.1245.
2 Ibid. p.62.
3 Ibid. p.141.
made angels of men in no time, and indeed, as an indispensable ladder, a boat or a raft to attain the vision of God. The Guru-oriented person, Gurumukh was considered an ideal human being, whereas the self-oriented person, manmukh, was looked upon as devoid of all worth. The holy composition of the Guru was called gurbani or shabads, which, in point of veneration, was as high as the Guru himself. The singing of shabads constituted the best mode of worship. Guru Nanak attached great importance to the setting up of sangats, holy assemblies, and wherever possible, he tried to establish them. These congregations were at first primarily concerned with religious devotion, though incidentally a few secular functions were also performed by them.

Another institution, that of pangat or Guru ka langar (free common mess), originated almost simultaneously with that of sangat. It performed a four-fold function. First, it imparted a secular dimension to the 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.

True to his heroic mission, he put the ideal of dharamyudh before the people. They were exhorted to live and die for the cause of dharma or righteousness. The Sikh concept of the Supreme Being was reinterpreted emphatically, bringing out His martial attributes. That God helped and protected His dear ones or the good, and destroyed the evil was an old recognized strand of the Sikh metaphysics. Guru Gobind Singh not only laid more emphasis on this strand than was the case before but also evolved the idea further. He envisaged God as a mighty, invincible warrior armed to the teeth and ever ready to use his powers in support of the good. History abounds in examples where He saved his people from the clutches of wicked tyrants. Goddess Durga or Chandi was commissioned by Him to help the gods to destroy their enemies, the demons. Subsequently, several Avatars such as Rama and Krishana were, sent to wage war against tyranny. Guru Gobind Singh also viewed himself in the role of a saviour divinely commissioned to uphold the cause of the weak and the oppressed.

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8 Ibid.
To inculcate the martial spirit of heroism in the minds of the people he ransacked the old Indian literature with the help of a number of poets and scholars living at his court, and brought out the heroic tradition enshrined therein. The most important of these works is *Chandi di Var* which is a free rendering in Punjabi of an old saga of heroism. The virile and martial style of the blank verse indicates the extent to which the purpose of the attempt has been fulfilled.\(^{11}\)

Martial valour and weapons of war go hand in hand. The Guru regarded weapons as objects of great sanctity and inculcated the idea of their worship. He even deified them and identified them with God himself. Hence the use of such names for God as *Sarbloh* (All steel), *Kharagket* (Emblem of the Sword) and *Bhagautis* (Sword).

But weapons of war were not merely to be worshipped. They were to be used, and their use was to be learnt the hard way through training and practice. Therefore, soon after his accession in 1675, Guru Gobind Singh started training his followers in the use of arms as well as in the technique of fighting. Like his grand-father, Guru Hargobind, he showed preference for offerings of horses, weapons and other things that might be useful in fighting. He also got prepared a big drum and named it *Ranjit Nigara*. The Sikhs at Makhcwal were trained to observe their daily programme to the beat of this drum. This device was useful in imparting to the Sikh ranks the qualities of regularity and discipline. From the beginning of his career, the Guru was very particular about going on hunting expeditions. Such exercises, he believed, were useful for learning war manœuvres. In a short time he had the nucleus of a body of trained warriors. In fact, this idea of practicing people in the art of fighting was no innovation introduced by him. It was simply a continuation of the tradition which had come down to him from the time of the Sixth Guru through the succeeding. However, the degree of emphasis laid on this aspect under him was far greater than had been the case ever before.

When these measures were in progress, alongside of them Guru Gobind Singh endeavored to secure solidarity with the hill chiefs of Rajput extraction. They were known for their gallantry, and also had some valuable resources at their command. Besides, the hold of the Mughal Government over them was not complete, and there

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
was a possibility that with a little support and guidance from outside they would like to throw away completely the yoke of the Mughal overlord-ship. But the Guru's experience with them for some years convinced him that they might be a liability rather than an asset to him. These hill chiefs were tradition-bound and caste-ridden, and too much entangled in their petty politics to be exposed to the inspiration of any high national ideal. Rather, they got alarmed by the growing influence of the Guru as also by his social reforms which equated the high-born with the low-born.

The hostility of the Rajput Princes made the Guru pay greater heed to Anandpur. Anandpur was strategically a much better place than Paunta in the state of Nahan. That is why after about three years only, the Guru had returned to Anandpur. But Anandpur, too, lost much of its natural security, the moment the hill chiefs became unfriendly towards the Guru. Hence the urgency of fortifying the town and building some forts to strengthen its defences. The forts built there, namely Anandgarh, Kesgarh, Fatehgarh, Holgarh and Lohgarh were all situated on carefully selected sites in and around the town.

The creation of the Khalsa was the crowning event of Guru Gobind Singh's life from the standpoint of both organization and ideology. Organizationally, it completely eliminated the need of the order of the masands. The masand system had become corrupt, decrepit and creaky, and needed to be replaced immediately by a better system. But so long as charanamrit (nectar prepared by a toe-wash) remained the mode of initiating new aspirants into the fold of Sikhism, masands could not be completely done away with. The introduction of Khande di pahul (nectar prepared by stirring a Khanda—two-edged sword—in it) by Guru Gobind Singh rendered the washing of the toe for amrit preparation unnecessary. As the new baptism could be administered by any five good Sikhs (called Panj Payaras) the element of sole dependence upon a few individuals, such as the masands, was removed. After this step was taken, it was not difficult to abolish the order of the masands publicly, and this was soon done, but the Guru was not content with that. He caught hold of some of the masands and made a public example of them. He also inserted in the rahit (code of the Khalsa) that any kind of association with the masands was forbidden.
Ideologically, the creation of the Khalsa aimed at a well-balanced combination of the ideals of bhagti and shakti, of moral and spiritual excellence and militant valour or heroism of the highest order. The use of a double-edge sword in the preparation of the amrit (nectar) was a psychological booster. The changing of names at the time as part of the new mode of baptism was also intended to revolutionize the psyche of the Sikhs. All names of the baptized Sikhs were now to end in the uniform appellation of Singh meaning lion, “Thus making lions of humble disciples and raising them with one strike to a position of equality with the noblest and most warlike class in India, for up to that time only the Rajputs bore the exalted title of Singh.” “They were now to feel; is good and as great as the members of the Solar and the Lunar dynasties.”

Still another means to promote the spirit of martial valour among the Sikhs was the inclusion in the code of the Khalsa of an injunction for the compulsory wearing of arms, Kirpan, being one and the most important of them.

Further, the Guru 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 be with them." They were also told that they were born to conquer. The new salutation given to the Sikhs was “Waheguru ji ka Khalsa Waheguru ji ki Fateh” (The Lord’s is the Khalsa. the Lord’s is the victory.) The Guru by this means, instilled into the minds of his followers the idea that they were the chosen instrument of God and must win, whatever be the odds against them; No wonder, then, that the Singhs of Guru Gobind Singh, thus leavened, did not hesitate to dare all and risk all.

But the Singhs were not to be merely soldiers. It was imperative that they must at the same time be saints, deeply devoted to God, singing His hymns as composed by the Gurus observing the daily religious discipline prescribed in the rahit of the Khalsa and bearing a high moral character. There was no contradiction between the twin ideals of soldiering and saintliness. In fact, they were complementary to each other. Spiritual and moral values had to be protected with military strength, if they were to be saved for humanity. In the same way, military strength needed to be guided and

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13 Ibid.p.83.
directed by goals set by high moral and spiritual values, otherwise there was a likelihood of its being misused.

While creating the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh did not forget to confer upon it a mark of distinctiveness in the form of unshorn hair of the head and the beard. Without any cost, this measure not only gave the Sikhs a manly bearing suited to the ideology in which they were nurtured, but also made it impossible for them in future to conceal their identity as some Sikhs at Delhi had done at the time of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s execution.

All these measures helped to frustrate the centrifugal forces that were in operation in the ranks of the Sikh community at the time of Guru Gobind Singh’s accession. The community was now united and integrated as never before. All members of the community enjoyed equal privileges with one another, and there was no high and no low, so far as rights were concerned. Nor was the Guru superior to them, for by receiving amrit from the Panj Pyaraas he had exploded the myth of his superiority to his followers. This equality of privileges with one another and with the Guru, common external appearance, common leadership and the community of aspirations bound the Sikhs together into a compact mass, raising their strength manifold.14

The Sikh creed, expressed in the form of devotional poetry, enunciating truths of the spirit, while lifting man into the sphere of transcendent experience and confirming in him certain attitudes, particularly those called Vairag (dispassion towards the material world and its concerns) and Bhakti (Devotion to God conceived of as the Beloved Supreme), is also by virtue of its idealism a great guide to conduct. This conduct has various stages in which it is made manifest— the stage of “conversion of the heart” which witnesses the qualities of tolerance, humility, forgiveness and love; the stage of spiritually-guided action such as restraint and the ever-prayerful attitude of mind, and later still, the stage of fruitful action in the world of human relations, making man one of the Elect of God.15 This process of conversion and conditioning of conduct is hard, life-long and unending, calling for self-surrender and self-examination, involving severe discipline, as has been testified in numerous

15 Singh, Pashaura and N. Gerald Barrier, Sikh Identity; Continuity and Change, New Delhi, Manohar, 1999.p.58.
pronouncements of the holy Gurus, from Guru Nanak onwards. Sikh teachings emphasize the inescapable relationship with conduct, without which the seeker may be said to rest only in a preliminary stage of initiation. His faith must be tested and made the basis of conduct—“in each moment”. God-consciousness must impel him to pure conduct. The religious life is conceived of neither as a set of philosophical postulates apprehended intellectually, nor as ecstasy or emotion, as in the case of purely devotional creeds—it is all these also—but as a way of life, guided by the light of faith. Such a consummation is reiterated and emphasized again and again in Sikh teachings, and no doubt or vagueness is allowed to remain about this.

In Sikh teachings the Guru’s words enunciating the creed has two distinct but related facets: a basic Truth, which is not merely thought, idea or concept, since it is not arrived at by a process of reasoning but by the spiritual vision, and the Power (here again this term must be deliberately retained, since the force of the Guru’s Word consists not merely in presenting a concept, but in being able to transform the whole personality), the power to transform mere humanity into divine beings,\footnote{Adi Granth, p.1312.} in the striking figure used by Guru Nanak. The truth in which the soul is called by the spiritual Guide, the Guru, to rest is thus the basis of all conduct, both individual and social. These two aspects of the creed are inseparable, inasmuch as the process of self-purification and transcendence of human frailty cannot but be based, to be fruitful, on the Truth inculcated and spiritually assented to. Such assent, to which numerous names are given—the most comprehensive being Gian, Juan or Enlightenment—would remain barren, and fruitless if it is not to transform conduct in sphere extending far beyond the individual search after ritual purification. There is, thus an integrated view of the spiritual and moral life which Guru Nanak enunciated in his word and those who imbibed it tried to realize its essence in their own daily conduct.\footnote{Singh Fauja, Sikhism, Op.cit.p.79.} The accent in Guru Nanak’s teachings falls on two things in particular; against the limitation of the spiritual and moral conduct to ritual actions, and against confining the moral action to the individual self, or to such narrow confines as ones’ tribe, race or denomination.
The spiritual path is the path of seeking true enlightenment by the processes of Reverence, Contemplation and Absorption. These are designated by the Guru as Suniai (lit. Listening), Mannai and Dhyana. The seeker, who has undergone this discipline must then practice the Truth in his life, and spread its blessings around. He may thus become one of the ‘Elect’ (Panch), or a ‘mighty hero’ (Jodh Maha Ball Sur). The implication of this heroism is moral and spiritual exclusively. He may, by the conduct of his life, attain Bliss (Anand) and Immunity from Transmigration. (The Japji says: those in whose souls are lodged God, are neither under the sway of Maya (Illusion); nor subject to spiritual death, i.e. transmigration). Ultimately, through them mankind is redeemed.18 This is their role.

Humanism: Implicit in the moral idealism or what has been called Moral Reason is the attitude known as Humanism. The essence of this is to give primacy to human well-being, spiritual and temporal, above ritual, ceremony, shibboleth and other arbitrary abstractions which encrusted social and religious tradition usually invents to continue over succeeding times the dominance of the, past. Guru Nanak's Word was a great liberating influence for the people. By exposing the hollowness of ceremonial and ritual, he made a plea for exalting human well-being above hollow, fossilized customs, rendered obsolete since millennia. Prayer, which in truth, should be devotion and worship, and absorption of the ego in the universal soul-is hollow and meaningless without spiritual participation in it. It is particularly castigated when it is all sham, a trap to catch the simple unwary people of the world by a show of piety, by means of a holy fraud. About such, the Guru, using telling symbols says:

“Those who eat of human flesh recite namaz;
Those wielding the butcher's knife wear the sacred thread.”19

Again, referring to the idea of ritual purity and impurity, the Guru stresses purity of the heart without which the mere show of external purity is a mockery and hypocrisy;

“Cloth is held impure if a drop of blood stain it;
How then, is pure the conduct of those who drink human blood? 20
This, of course, of is a castigation of tyranny and exploitation of mankind.
On untouchability, the Guru’s spirit of humility whereby he identifies himself with the humblest. The Guru calls evil thoughts, cruelty, slander and violence the real untouchables; with such lodged in the mind, how may one be considered pure? Speaking again of the ritual purification of the kitchen, for which orthodoxy has a particular ceremonial, the Guru calls falsehood the true impurity, in the face of which no ceremonial can cleanse and purify food. A few texts may be cited here further to amplify this theme of the supreme value of moral conduct in determining purity of honour:

The age is turned knife, rulers butchers;
righteousness has flown away on wings.
The dark night of evil is spread;
the moon of righteousness is nowhere visible.  
‘Know all human beings to be repositories of Divine Light;’
stop not to enquire about their caste.
‘Those forgetting the Lord are the truly low-caste.
Nanak, the fallen are those who live without God.’
In the Hereafter counts neither caste nor worldly power.
What counts there is purity and not these!
Nanak, they alone are holy whose deeds are entered as such in God’s reckoning.
‘Know ye this to be the measure of the Lord:
Caste and birth are not there considered.
Superiority of caste and worthiness are determined by man’s deeds.’

The Action Oriented Life: It is evident that the basic principle involved in the teaching of the Sikh Religion is the orientation of the human personality towards pure, socially fruitful action. For this, the steps necessary are enlightenment and restraint of passion. The personality so conditioned must wage a perpetual struggle against evil not only within itself, but in the external world of human relation. In accordance with a theme reiterated at great length in the Word of Guru Nanak and his successors, the true hero is one who has waged battle against the lower human desires, and has, through bearing in his mind the Fear of God, been rendered fearless. Such a one is free from the lure of personal desire, and fights against evil regardless of

21 Ibid. p.145.
22 Ibid. p.349.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.p.469.
25 Ibid.p.1330.
26 Japji.36.
consequences. Transcendence of the desire for fruits, in the Guru's teaching as also in the ancient moral wisdom of India is the mark of the man whose soul is poised for heroism:

"Nirvana lies in leaving unto God the fruits of desire. One who leaves all in the hands of the Creator, is acceptable to God, be he householder or recluse". 27  
"Nanak, forget not God—for the rest, leave everything to His Will". 28  
"One who breaks free of the lure of desire, alone will have union with God". 29  

True heroism is envisioned as waging battle against the lower self. From victory over it arises the spirit to fight in the human world against evil. Such heroes are characterized as below:

"Those who in the ambrosial early morning hour meditate on God and praise Him with minds concentrated,

Are the Real lords among men, engaging in battle when the hour arrives."30  

The ‘battle’ spoken of herein is, of course, the battle against the prompting of the lower self.

The true hero is defined, among other places in the holy Text, in the Japji. In stanza 38, the formation of the spiritual-ethical character is visualized in the figure of moulding gold into ornaments thus:

"With continence for blower: with poise the goldsmith, On the anvil of wisdom, with the tools of God's Word; With fear of God for bellows, in the fire of austere discipline; In the crucible of Divine Love-mould thou amrita. Thus is spiritual illumination moulded in the Divine Mint."31

27 Var Asa p.1329.  
28 Ibid. p.1010.  
29 Ibid. p.877.  
30 Ibid.p.145.  
31 Japji.38.
Leading on to this, is the delineation of the Sphere of Action-Action in the way of God:

“Might is the expression of the Sphere of Action-Incomparable is the achievement of those who are of it. Its denizens are heroes of supreme might. Inspired by God-consciousness.

In that sphere abide heroines like Sita of surpassing praise and beauty indescribable.

Such heroes suffer not mortality or guile. God Himself abides in their souls. In that sphere abide devotees worlds upon worlds, In everlasting Bliss, born of purity. 32

In these texts containing devotional poetry of supreme power, the deep inter-relationship between heroism and spiritual enlightenment is stated. To attain to this state, and not; merely to abide in individualistic piety, is the aim and end of the spiritual-ethical discipline towards which the teaching of Guru Nanak and his successors leads the human personality.

Spirit born Heroism: The emphasis on action as the consummation of the religious life has taken among the Sikh people certain highly distinctive forms in the course of their history, which when compared to the much longer periods during which Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam have influenced vast masses of humanity, is so brief. The Sikhs, under the influence, no doubt of the teachings of their Gurus however dimly though this may be understood by the common masses, have turned their face away from individualism, and in their worship and social conduct act as a group, which in small units is called Sangat (Congregation) while in its totality is Panth (The Commonwealth). Shedding passivity where situations calling for determined action or resistance arise, they act as a disciplined, organized force for mass action. What inspires them in the faith stemming from Guru Nanak himself, who prophesied nemesis on tyrants, and presented a vision of God as the Defender of Right and Chastiser of evil. In a telling phrase, Guru Nanak has worshipped God as Asur Sanghar 33 Destroyer of Demons, i.e. Evil-doers. This mode of apprehension of

32 Ibid.,37  
33 Adi Granth, p. 59 and 224.
the Divine is in a way unique in the history of medieval religious thought in India.
While in mythology, demons and tyrants were stated to have been destroyed by Divine Vengeance, the entire conception of such action was remote, and hedged in by miracle and myth, so that its application to situations of real life was never presented clearly to the human mind. Moreover, this was the age of the Bhakti cult, which emphasized tender devotion to the Divine person as Beloved, wrapping the entire conception of worship in soft, feminine erotic tones of great aesthetic appeal, but lulling the intelligence into a kind of dream away from reality and action. It was Guru Nanak who, with his prophetic vision of the stern realities operating on the human scene and the sovereignty of just retribution in the moral sphere, revived the ancient Indian Moral concept of Divine Justice overtaking evil-doers by a compulsive necessity in the very nature of things. This moral vision has descended to the Sikh people as their spiritual heritage, and has always characterized their world-view, turning them into crusaders and martyrs for causes where issues of conscience are involved. Sikhs as a people are easily moved by the call of conscience to action. Two examples will suffice. They did not spare to chastise even the great Maharaja Ranjit Singh for some lapse from morality. This would be unthinkable except among the Sikhs. Then, for several years around 1920 they waged a struggle involving heavy sacrifices including death and torture, against the corrupt guardians, called Mahants, of their shrines. This again is unique in Indian religious history. Such episodes and the general sensitiveness of Sikhs to the call of patriotism have their fountain in the spiritual-ethical teaching of the Gurus, which has passed into race-character with the Sikhs.

Guru Nanak laid great emphasis on non-violence as an overall ethical value. Adherence to truth, charity and forgiveness are considered to be the cardinal virtues of a righteous person. His conception of non-violence is of a positive nature it consists of cultivation of certain virtues and not merely in following rules of self-restraint. These include (1) not working all of any one, ahimsa in thought; (2) not speaking harshly of others, ahimsa in speech: (3) not obstructing the work of others, ahimsa action: (4) forgiving those who speak evil of oneself; (5) practicing physical, mental and spiritual endurance; and finally (6) helping the suffering even at the cost of one’s life. Nanak
said “where there is forgiveness there is God himself.” Thus, it is evident that Nanak carried the ethical aspect of non-violance to a magnificent construction, gave it a proper humanistic character and extricated it from the realm of speculative mysticism of the early Hindu and the Buddhist traditions. In this sense, Nanak made a unique contribution, to the development of a positive tradition of non-violence.

Guru Nanak believed in the doctrine of karma. He denounced discrimination on the basis of caste and made attempts to bring Hindus and Muslims together. He preached the destruction of such desires which cause unhappiness to oneself as well as to others, i.e., lust and anger. However, the mystical identity of the universal souls and universal experiences is not absent from his teachings. Nanak believed in the cosmic identity and unity of human consciousness and this is identified to be the basis of non-violence. It is the citadel of these virtues in whose cultivation lies the essence of all religions. Nanak like Kabir was against the outward ritualism in religion and considered the cultivation of moral values to be the basis of religious behaviour. Through this he also expected to bring about the unity of all religions. This tradition of non-violence and liberal humanism as set by Nanak was continued by many gurus of Sikkism. Guru Angad Deva (1504-1552) reiterated the preachings of Nanak and emphasized the ethics of humanism. Guru Arjan Dasa (1479-1574) opposed the tendency of self-love (selfishness) in men. This according to him was the source of human suffering. It could be avoided by compassion for other beings and feelings of altruism. Guru Rama Dasa (1534-1581 A.D.) taught against cruelty, heartlessness and self-centeredness. Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606 A.D.) re-emphasized the need for the suppressions of egoism and self-will and to approach God with absolute humility. He exhorted his believers to cultivate nine treasures of virtue and abjure from evil deeds. Among these virtues “repose and peace” happened to be the foremost ones. Guru Teg Bahadur (1621-1675 A.D.) taught cultivation of humility, devotion towards God and love for fellow beings as supreme virtues for men.

36 Ibid.p.62.
37 Ibid.p.67.
38 Ibid.p.77.
Sikh ethics are based upon three fundamental concepts: first, that the principles *kirt karo, nam japo and vand chako*, work, worship and charity, should dominate one's complete life. Second, that self-reliance (*haumai*) is the great enemy of God realization and that it manifests itself in the five evils of lust, anger, greed, materialism and pride. Activities which result from any of these vices should be avoided. This is best done by practising the virtues of contentment, patience, the service of others and humility, which is considered to be the lynchpin of them all. Guru Nanak once remarked, ‘Sweetness and humility are the essence of all virtues.’

*The householder basis of ethics*

It is as a householder (*grihasthi*), a member of a family, not as one who has withdrawn from the world either to become a student or a hermit, that a Sikh should explore the meaning of God-realization. Again the Guru said, ‘The householder who gives all that can be afforded to charity is as pure as the water of the Ganges.’

Putting the principles into practice is difficult because the requirement to live like a lotus in a dirty pond, to be in the world but not attached to it, to radiate beauty and remain pure, is hard. It is easier to turn away from the social responsibilities but asceticism and renunciation are rejected. Instead Guru Nanak commanded:

> “Remain in towns and near the main high roads, but be alert. Do not covet your neighbours possessions. Without the Name we cannot attain inner peace nor still our inner hunger. The Guru has shown me the real life of the city, the real life of its shops, it is the inner life. We must be traders, in truth, moderate in our eating and sleeping. This is true yogism.”

*Caste*

The predominant Hindu culture in a Mughal imperial context determined which social concerns should dominate Sikh teaching. Consequently caste and the status of women assume considerable attention in the teachings of the Gurus. The religious implications of the caste system were rejected by the very fact that the Gurus were Khatris not Brahmins. Whilst they had a right and responsibility to know the Vedas they had no business to teach them.

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40 Adi Grantha. 470.
41 Ibid. 939.
In fact they replaced Vedic knowledge with their own and asserted a divine initiation into guruship. Using the vernacular instead of Sanskrit they went even further against the Brahminic tradition, as set out in the Laws of Manu, by preaching to the lowest castes and accepting them into the Sikh Panth. The Harmandir at Amritsar was given four doors to be open to all four castes, and Guru Arjan said of the Adi Granth:

“This divine teaching is for everyone, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. Whoever utters the Name which lives in all hearts, under the Guru’s instruction, is delivered from the Dark Age [Kali Yug].” 42

The caste system was condemned primarily because it was a practical denial that God is one and the creator and sustainer of all life:

God’s light pervades every creature and every creature is contained in the Divine Light.43

The consequence of this, as the Guru discovered, was that the Shudra as well as the Brahmin could attain God-realization. Many of the lower caste might receive enlightenment, for they were already of humble status though haumai could stand in anyone’s way. Man from one clay, and at death would return to the same dust be she a princess or washerwoman or a priest or cobbler:

In the hereafter caste and power do not count, for every soul appears there in its true colours.44

As the aim of the God-realized person was to live on earth as he would live death in the presence of God so he was instructed:

‘Know people by the light which illumines them, and do not ask what their caste is. In the hereafter no one is distinguishable by caste.’ 45

Guru Nanak’s primary reason for attacking the caste system was theological rather than social. Although all the Gurus attacked it and the adoption of the names Singh and Kaur as well as the institution of the langar (common kitchen) were

42 Ibid. 747.
43 Ibid. 469.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid. 349.
successful attempts to remove caste distinction within the *panth*, the message of Sikhism is concerned with liberating the atman or loti more than ameliorating social conditions. The elimination of caste even within the community has only been partial. Though Sikhs will eat together in the *langar*, worship together and share *karah parshad*, marriages are still usually arranged between members of the same subgroup.

Vegetarianism

Vegetarianism is another form in which the Hindu doctrine of non-violence is expressed. Here the position of Sikhs is far from clear. Many Sikhs will not eat any form of meat, rejecting fish as well as eggs. For some, however, the cow is a forbidden animal and they do not eat beef. In the *langar*, however, meat is never served so no visitor is embarrassed in consequence. Guru Amar Das ate only rice and lentils but his abstemiousness cannot be regarded as evidence of vegetarianism, only of simple living. Guru Nanak seems to have eaten venison or goat, depending upon different *janam sakhī* versions of a meal he cooked at Kurukshetra which evoked the criticism of Brahmins. Pages 1289 and 1290 of the Guru Granth Sahib contain a number of verses 'which can only be read as a rejection of the belief that flesh-eating is polluting and should be avoided. 'We are born from flesh the Spirit (*jiu*) lives in flesh,' is the refrain. 'When one is taken from the womb of flesh one takes a mouthful of milk from teats of flesh.' He refers to myths in which the gods sacrifice animals and asserts that meat-eating is permitted in the Hindu Puranas and the Quran, and has been accepted in all the four ages of the Hindu time cycle. Fools quarrel over flesh,' he says, 'but they do not know and meditate on God.

One of the commandments laid upon a Khalsa member is that of not eating meat slaughtered according to Muslim practice. Sikh vegetarians see this as a rejection of a particular method of slaughter not a permission to eat meat killed in some other way. However, the prohibition must be seen as permitting the eating of meat killed at a stroke and not bled to death. Vegetarianism is not a universal Hindu custom and the Jats and other groups in the Punjab were meat-eaters. For the Sikh of today vegetarianism is a matter of personal conscience.
The doctrine of non-violence (ahimsa) permeates India as strongly as the social phenomenon of caste. It is usual to read that Guru Nanak was a pacifist and that Guru Gobind Singh changed the religion by creating the militant Khalsa. The transformation began with Guru Hargobind acting upon the advice of his father to arm himself and his followers. Here it is necessary to question the view that the early Gurus were pacifist. The fact of the matter seems to be that pacifism was not an issue. Guru Nanak was a spiritual preceptor who also told those who became his disciples how to order their lives. His immediate successors were responsible for spreading the same message and establishing the community. After Babur’s invasion in the early sixteenth century, the Punjab enjoyed peace until Emperor Akbar's death and better government and security than it had known for several centuries. Only later when Mughal policy alienated the Sikhs as well as other indigenous groups was there violent unrest. When Guru Arjan told his son to arm the Sikhs he does not seem to have considered himself to be creating a new doctrine and rejecting an established tradition, but merely responding to the changed needs of the time. He was also rejecting the Mughal regulation that only Muslims and Rajputs should be allowed to bear arms. It was the changed religious situation that forced Sikhs to distinguish allegiance to the Panth from loyalty to the state in certain circumstances. Guru Nanak's encounter with the invading Mughals at Saidpur in 1521 provides an interesting insight into his approach to violence. The town was taken and plundered by Babur’s army from Khurasan and the Guru was taken captive. As he tramped along in the company of other men, women and children whose lives had been spared he composed a hymn, part of which reads:

"It is your will, O God! Honour and dishonour both are your gifts. You bestow one or the other at your pleasure. O people if you had thought of God in time and taken heed this retribution would not have fallen on your heads. Oh kings, if you hadn't lost all wisdom amid self indulgence and pleasure this misery wouldn't have befallen the land. Now the armies of Babur are spreading across the country. No one can eat in peace. How hard it is for the captives. The times of worship and prayer pass by unused. These Indian women have nowhere to sit and cook, to bathe or anoint..."
themselves by putting the frontal mark on their foreheads. They never gave God a thought, now they have no time for God remembrance."46

His tone is that of the prophet declaring that Babur's invasion is the chastisement of God. In fact a few verses later he makes this explicit:

“Today Khurasan seems to be yours, why not India? Why have you made that land yours and terrified this by the terrible threat of retribution?-Are you pitiless, Creator of all? You have sent Yama [god of death] disguised as the Mughal.”

He questions God:

‘Did you feel no pity for what happened, for the screams of those who cried in agony?’

He concludes by saying that all, victor and victim, should remember that they are in his sight and that hope lies only in serving God:

“You see even the smallest crawling creatures and the worm that nibbles the corn. That one alone can win merit who has accepted death in life, who has put down the lower nature and lives hourly in the spirit and who, moment by moment, loves, serves and remembers you.”47

In keeping with his teaching the Guru provided spiritual comfort for the prisoners. He also asked Babur for their release, charging him to rule India wisely and with justice, but he left no one in doubt that, political solutions were inadequate for what were ultimately spiritual problems. What little attention the early Gurus give to politics in their hymns does not seem to be pacifist. Guru Nanak condemned the Kshatriya (politician) caste for neglecting their duties:

‘The Kshatriya have abjured their dharma and taken to an alien one. The whole world has assumed the same caste and the rule of righteousness has lapsed.’48

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.360.
48 Ibid 663.
The caste all had adopted was that of self-interest. Guru Amar Das characterized the true Kshatriya as follows:

“He alone is a Kshatriya who is brave in good deeds. He yokes himself to charity and alms giving. Within the field, bounded by the protecting fence of justice he sows seed which benefits everyone.”

During the period of Guru Gobind Singh the struggle against Mughal authority, which had continued intermittently for two generations, became a crusade at times. Among his other writings the Guru sent an admonitory letter to the Emperor Aurangzeb, known as the Zafarnama. In this he took the Emperor to task for the perjury of his officials who had attacked the Guru’s forces after a peaceful withdrawal from Anandpur had been arranged in 1704. He also blamed Aurangzeb for his misuse of power and chided him on his unholy alliance with idol-worshipping rajas when he described himself as an idol-breaker! In this Letter of Admonition he named him not bhut shikan (idol breaker) by which he was popularly known, but paiman shikan (oath breaker).

The Guru accepted the idea of the just war and enunciated it in a famous couplet form his Zafarnama.

When all efforts to restore peace prove useless and no words avail,

Lawful is the flash of steel, it is right to draw the sword.

His verses differ from those of his predecessors most significantly in their use of military metaphors and their references to the struggle against tyranny. Nevertheless he taught, that besides only bring undertaken as a last resort, it should always be defensive, for the protection of the oppressed and the cause of liberty. The Sikh should never be the first to draw the sword. An epitaph upon his life and a conclusion to the discussion of the Sikh attitude to violence might be the epilogue to one of his own epics, the Story of Chandi (the goddess Durga):

\[\text{Ibid.1411}\]
Grant, me this boon, 0 God, from your bounty. May I never retrain from righteous acts. May I fight every foe in life’s battle without fear and claim the victory with confidence and courage.

May my greatest ambition be to sing your praises and may your glory be engrained in my mind.

When this mortal life reaches its end may I die fighting with limitless courage.  

_The ‘just war’: dharam yudh_

According to Guru Gobind Singh there should be five conditions for the Dharma Yudh:

1. It should be a last resort when all other means have failed.

2. It should be waged without enmity or the desire for revenge. Perhaps he had the detachment enjoined by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita in mind.

3. Territory should not be annexed. Property captured should be returned at the ending of hostilities. Looting and the taking of booty are forbidden.

4. The army should be made up of soldiers committed to the cause, not mercenaries. It should be disciplined. The soldiers should not smoke or drink or molest the women folk of their adversaries (often considered to be spoils of war).

5. The minimum of force should be used to achieve the objective. When it has been achieved hostilities should cease.

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50 Ibid.
The transformation of the peaceful movement of Sikhism into a militant sect was brought about by the sixth Guru Har Govind and the tenth and the last, Guru Govind Singh. This was in response to the increasing atrocities of the Muslim invaders and rulers. Guru Govind Singh selected live of his followers into new fraternity called khalsa (pure cult) who were called *panj pyara* (five beloved ones). These constituted the central committee through which the Sikh militant movement was sponsored and organized. This change in the Sikhism from its humanistic form resembling Hindu mysticism to a theocratic militarism, was an immediate reaction against the contemporary political conditions. However, there is some reason to believe that this process of transition also "stultified" the growth of the humanistic philosophy in Sikhism and it soon deteriorated in the form of a communal movement. About this process Toynbee writes: "An outstanding example of self-stultification through resort to force was presented in the Hindu history by Sikhism, a would-be synthesis of Hinduism with Islam which had started by practicing fraternity as a corollary to its preaching of monotheism, had gone astray through allowing itself to become the sectarian faith of militant founders of a successor state of the Mughal raj, and had come eventually to be little more than the distinctive mark of a community that had virtually become another Hindu caste."

While the maintenance of peace is essential it cannot be at the cost of freedom and national sovereignty and honour. Benevolent violence and violence abandoned for the sake of weak and the oppressed or in self defense or against injustice and intolerance are not a sin. At times, peace is also to be defended when tyranny is a reality and peaceful means cannot solve a problem and when moral appeals fall on deaf ears and fail to prick the conscience of a marauder.

The concept of *miri* (temporal power) and *piri* (spiritual power) was evident in Sikhism from the times of Guru Nanak. In 1606, Guru Hargobind (6th Nanak) contrary to the old practice arrayed himself with two swords as emblems of miri and piri thereby giving a new twist to nonviolence and reaffirmed the historical necessity of righteousness. *Miri* and *piri* which also represent the 5-Ks (Sikh symbols) of the.

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Khalsa are not only complementary to One an other, but flourish together being inseparable and the emergence of sant sipahi (saint soldier) can well be attributed to this concept. Over a period, logically this concept developed into a tradition which is of equal relevance and importance today if the Sikh sentimental assertion *raj karega khalsa* is to come true. Hence, the desirability to reinterpret and propagate the philosophy of *miri* and *piri* in the existing social and political environments. The steel of Sikhism which is built up on tribulations and travails could not have been as shining as it is had it not been given the temper of sufferings and sacrifices of its martyrs and heroes. Is there any other martyr like Guru Gobind Singh who not only sacrificed his life but effaced his entire family for national cause? Force is a gift, a sacred trust to be used judiciously coupled with sense of human values of truth and love which inspire and mould a person. Sikhism teaches not to yield to servitude nor to accept the ‘peace of the grave’ which is of dubious value. “The Singh must never be unarmed, but he should be docile as a cow. However, when he feels a tyrant is incorrigible and moral principle is at stake or when he finds the ruler is indifferent to justice he can use his weapons, but only in the last resort.” Designs for a Justifiable war are preferable to semi-pacifism; a grudging tolerance can not survive for long.

Just as it does not behave a watchman to sleep on his beat, so it does not become of a Sikh to be a cowardly observer when courage is demanded of him, or to act meekly as a lamb being led to a slaughter house, or to offer nonviolence as an excuse in the face of oppression Or when national interests are at stake, i.e., when he is to resist evil or when there is a call for sacrifice for a righteous cause. In such a situation while not sacrificing the basic human values of truth and love, use of the creed of sword bequeathed by Guru Gobind Singh is justified and the question of moral qualms does not arise. In Sikh history, the sword (which has been honoured as “an embless of power and self respect”) enjoys a privileged position as it was used and continues to be used, to punish the wicked and defend the weak. The Guru who regarded violence as an abominable thing says: “Blessed is he in this world who cherished struggle against evil in his heart and at the same time is in complete unison with the Lord.” To be indifferent when aggressive evil is to be resisted is un-Sikh like.
While some regard “words a more potent force than weapons”, broadly speaking the policy of all nations today is: “Preparedness for war is the best guarantee of peace.” It is a historical fact that at times many a nation had to walk on war path for the sake of peace since progress depends on continued peace. Nonviolence does not mean ‘disband armed forces’, but that the sword should be wielded judiciously.