PREFACE
This thesis, "DEMOCRATIC IDEALS AND INSTITUTIONS IN SIKH RELIGION" attempts a subject which has not so far been dealt with in a seriously academic fashion. Some aspects of it may have been covered in some stray articles, but the present one is the first sustained study of a theme which would strike as obviously significant to any student of Sikh religion and history. The inspiration to cover this unchartered ground came from my revered teacher Dr Hari Ram Gupta, an eminent historian.

The Sikh Gurus expounded a religion based primarily on democratic concepts and institutions. The essence of the teachings of the Gurus was the unity of God and the brotherhood of man. We find in them an unbroken thread of the ideals of selfless service, love for mankind, humility, equality, fraternity and honest endeavour. The equality of man is their sheet-anchor. To give a practical shape to these ideals, the Gurus established and developed the institutions of 'Sangat' and 'Pangat'. The process of development of these institutions continued gradually until Guru Hargobind brought about a transformation by giving a militant turn to the movement. The most dramatic development was Guru Gobind Singh's creation of the Khalsa brotherhood through a novel system of baptism. Another feature of this transformation was the bridging of the gulf between the guru and the disciple. What impressed the masses was not only the Guru's complete identification with the common man but also his condescending to kneel down before
his disciples to receive baptism from them — a unique and unheard of incident in the history of mankind!

The period under study is that of the Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh (1469-1708 A.D.).

The first chapter of this thesis is an introduction to the subject. In it, the idea of the growth and development of democracy has been traced briefly. A brief survey of the conditions prevailing in the Indian society during the Middle Ages, with special reference to the Punjab has been made. A clear picture of the society which existed at the time of the origin of the Sikh Religion emerges from it.

The second chapter deals with the caste-system and the Sikh Gurus. The genesis of the caste-system, its functioning through the ages, the ills incidental to it, its reorientation by the Buddha and Mahavira, its denunciation by Islam and the reformers of the Bhakti Movement have been brought out in this chapter. The views of the Gurus regarding the caste-system and how they tried to put into practice the ideals of equality and brotherhood of man born of the concept of monotheism have been shown in broad relief.

The third chapter treats of the institution of 'Sangat' in its historical perspective and how the Sikh Gurus added new dimensions to it with a view to levelling down the social barriers and initiating their followers into a corporate living.

The fourth chapter discusses the institution of 'Pangat'
(langar). Its background with special reference to the Indian society has been traced. The Sikh Gurus laid special emphasis on this institution for the propagation of the ideals of love and service of fellow-beings, humility, earning one's livelihood with honest means and sharing the fruits of one's labour with others. The disciples were thus schooled in community-living which instilled democratic ideals and institutions into their minds.

The Gurus' enunciation of equality of man and woman is given in the fifth chapter. The position of Indian women in society has been traced from the earliest times to the period of the Gurus. The views of the Gurus regarding the rights and the status of women have been quoted. The denunciation of the ills like 'purdah', 'Sati' and infanticide has been emphasized.

The sixth chapter highlights the Khalsa brotherhood. The creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh, its deep ideological impact, its tremendous after-effects, its epoch-making consequences have been discussed in detail. Special attention has been focussed on the new method of baptism with 'khanda' (the double-edged sword), the complete identification of the Guru with the Five Beloved Ones and the mighty social and spiritual objective that he achieved through this novel method of baptism and the common code of conduct laid down for all the members of the Khalsa brotherhood.

The subject has been projected from philosophical and
historical angles. The enunciation of the ideals laid down by the Gurus has a philosophical postulate and the working out of these ideals in the institutions shaped by the Gurus is put in the historical frame of reference.

So far as the philosophical aspect of this thesis is concerned, the prime sources of information are the Guru Granth, the Dasam Granth and the Vars of Bhai Gurdas. I have drawn on them liberally in substantiating my views. The verses have been quoted in original along with their translations made by recognized authorities such as Dr Bhai Jodh Singh, Dr Gopal Singh and Max Arthur Macauliffe. For the historical aspect of this thesis, I have chiefly depended on manuscripts, classified documents, and modern works published in English, Persian, Urdu and Punjabi relevant to the theme of this thesis.

Dr Ganda Singh, the distinguished historian has been an unfailing source of inspiration and guidance to me. I have received valuable suggestions from Dr Bhai Jodh Singh, Sardar Kirpal Singh Narang, Dr Fauja Singh, Professor Harbans Singh and Dr Taran Singh in the completion of this work.

In the end, I register my deep debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Dr R.R.Sethi, formerly Head of the Department of History, Panjab University, Chandigarh. But for his guidance, help and inspiration, I would not have been able to complete my research project.

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