CHAPTER I

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DEFINITION AND SCOPE OF DEMOCRACY

The concept of democracy has undergone a tremendous change through the ages. According to Seligman, no definition of democracy can adequately sum up the vast history which the concept connotes. To some it is a form of government; to others it is a way of life. Men have found its essence in the character of the electorate, in the relation between a government and its people, in the absence of wide economic differences among the members of different sections of society, in the refusal to recognize privileges based on colour, caste and creed. Consequently, it has changed its substance in terms of time and space. ¹

Democracy is the political expression of the ethical principles which maintain that the true end of man is freedom within the framework of his responsibilities and duties towards the State. This is in conformity with Immanuel Kant's celebrated moral principle, "So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of another, in every case as an end, never only as a means". ²

In principle, democracy is ethical and, therefore, universal. It knows no bounds but those of life itself. Vyara says: "May all beings be happy, may all attain bliss, may all see happy days, may no man be subject to sufferings".  

Democracy aims at the interests of society as a whole, not of any particular class or community. All individuals, whatsoever be their faith, should be received into political society solely on the basis of humanity. When we say all men are equal, we mean that all men are centres of absolute values. So far as the materialistic values are concerned, we are unequal. Mahatma Gandhi also holds the same opinion: "My idea of society is", says he, "that while we are born equal, meaning that we have a right to equal opportunity, all do not have the same capacity. It is in the nature of the things impossible. ... The controversy about the equality of all men is due to a failure to make the distinction between moral and materialistic values".

Democracy has its distinctive characteristics in every sphere of life and in each of these spheres, it poses special problems which do not admit of satisfactory or universal generalization.

In the political sphere, democracy remained a negative

concept till the seventeenth century. Men protested against systems which, on one ground or another, deprived them of a legitimate share in power. The aim of political democracy is to recognize the rights of man in regard to political power. Democracy is the government of the people in the sense that the term 'people' includes all members of the society. It is opposed to monarchy which is the rule of one, and to oligarchy, which is the rule of the few, i.e. of a class privileged either by birth or by property. It is entirely opposed to the suppression of minorities and the minority opinion. If minorities are suppressed or silenced, democracy degenerates into tyranny of the ruling class. Thus democracy denotes that form of government, in which the poor class always, the more numerous, does, in fact, rule.  

In the economic sphere, the idea of economic equality emerged clearly in the wake of the French Revolution. Economic power came to be regarded as the fount of political power. Hence economic equality became the base upon which the edifice of democracy could be raised.

In its social aspect, the urge for social equality is older than political or economic equality. Protests against the usurpation of privileges on the basis of birth dates back to the earliest period of history. Reluctance to accept slavery or inferior status is probably as old as slavery itself. But

the claims to religious equality, educational equality and equal participation in the fruits of social endeavour have been raised only in a subtle manner.

The basis of democratic development is, therefore, the demand for equality. For the development of ethical and spiritual democracy, there is need to educate men to realize the nature of human brotherhood. There is also a need for the cultivation of democracy as a state of mind, a way of life to help the human spirit to expand, develop and blossom in accordance with the inherent law of its own nature. Religion is probably the way out.

But religion appears to have failed humanity in most of the cases, because the spiritual leaders were in league with the temporal despots all over the world during the Middle Ages. Religion had degenerated into a hoax, an organized fraud in the name of which, the innocent and gullible masses were duped with false hopes and promises of the other world. Instead of becoming an elevating, purifying and ennobling force, religion, rather became an instrument of social exploitation, political bargaining and spiritual hypocrisy. It strengthened the hands of political despots who rode roughshod over the civil and political rights of the people.

PICTURE OF INDIAN SOCIETY DURING THE MIDDLE AGES

India, like the rest of the world, presented a gloomy picture in the fifteenth century and the early sixteenth century. The country was under the worst type of theocratic rule of the Delhi Sultans. The Hindus were subjected to all sorts of severities and privations. A reign of terror and devastation, backed up by religious intolerance and fanaticism, was let loose.

The *Taj-ul-Ma'asir* of Hasan Nizami Nishapur, *Tabqat-i-Nasiri* of Minhaj-ul-Saraj, *Tawarikh-i-Alai* or Khazaima-ul-Futuh of Amir Khusrau, *Taziyat-ul-Amsar* or Tazijiyat-ul-Asar of Abdullah Wassaf are full of the accounts of destruction of Hindu temples, and of the wholesale massacre, and forcible conversion of Hindus to Islam by the Delhi Sultans. According to Amir Khusrau and Farishta, the Hindus were subjected to all sorts of excesses and atrocities. Their temples were destroyed and their idols broken.

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9. Bute Shah (Ghulam Mahi-ud-Din), *Tawarikh-i-Punjab*, MS.f.120.
11. Elliot and Dowson, *History of India as told by its own Historian*, Vol.3, p.144.
Such a confused state of affairs continued to prevail even under the Lodhi rulers. At the time of Guru Nanak's birth (A.D. 1469), Bahlol Lodhi was the ruler of the country. At the time of his succession, disintegration stalked the land. According to Erskine, "The monarchy was a congeries of nearly independent principalities, Jagirs and provinces, each ruled by a hereditary chief, or by a zamindar or delegate from Delhi, and the inhabitants looked more to their immediate Governors, who had absolute power in the province, and in whose hands, consequently, lay their happiness or misery, than to a distant and little-known sovereign. It was the individual, not the law, that reigned".  

Bahlol Lodhi was succeeded by Sikandar Lodhi (A.D. 1488). He was a strong man but he could not control his nobles. The Tarikh-i-Daudi tells us that Sikandar Lodhi was famous for his liberal-mindedness, dignity and politeness. He was a lover of justice, but in a theocratic State, his justice had its limitations. For Hindus he was only a narrow-minded bigot and they could get no justice at his hands.

Farishta relates the story of one Bodhan Brahmin who lived at Kayathan near Lakhnau (Lucknow). He was put to death by Sikandar Lodhi for stating that Hindu religion was as true as Islam. The Sultan ordered him either to embrace Islam or to

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face death. The Brahmin chose the latter course.16

Ibrahim Lodhi succeeded to the throne of Delhi A.D. 1517. He was much worse than Sikandar Lodhi, and his nobles began to conspire to replace him and instal his brother, Jalal Khan, on the throne, but the conspiracy was somehow crushed. It was out of distrust that the Governor of Lahore, Daulat Khan Lodhi, invited Babar to invade India. A triangular contest between the Mughals, the Sultan and the Pathans of Delhi ensued.

Daulat Khan Lodhi, the Governor of the Punjab, remained loyal to Sikandar Lodhi so long as the latter lived. But after the death of the Sultan, he decided to establish a separate kingdom of his own in the Punjab. Alam Khan Lodhi, the uncle of Ibrahim Lodhi, was also then hatching a conspiracy to overthrow the Sultan and to occupy the throne. He often visited the Punjab and discussed his plans with Daulat Khan, thus making a common cause with him. The intelligence of these intrigues reached Ibrahim Lodhi and he summoned him. Instead of going himself, Daulat Khan sent his son, Dilawar Khan, to Delhi. Dilawar Khan was arrested, but he escaped imprisonment and related to his father the treatment meted out to him. This precipitated the matter. Daulat Khan invited Babar to invade in a spirit of retaliation. He promised to give him every assistance against the Delhi Sultan. Babar accepted the

16. Farishta, Mohammed Qasim, Tarikh-i-Farishta, MS.f.534-536.
invitation and invaded India, bringing in his train havoc and destruction. Thousands of Punjabi women were captured and put to all sorts of ignominy. Guru Nanak has made a touching reference in *Asa Mehala I* to the havoc wrought by Babar.

"Where are the stables now, where the horses, where are the drums, where the flutes? Where are the sword belts, where the chariots, where the red dresses (of the soldiers), pray? Where are the looking-glasses, where the beauteous faces? No, I see them not before me". ... 17

At Saidpur Babar indulged in mass killings of the innocent population in cold blood. Many were carried away as slaves. Wealth and beauty of women proved to be their bane. They were forcibly taken away and molested. Guru Nanak further dwells on the situation prevailing at that time in *Asa Mehala I*

"Those whose lustrous hair shone in plaits and was filled with vermillion in the parting, their hair was sheared with scissors and they were choked by the dust (of Babar’s hordes) Yes, they who revelled in their palaces, now find not a seat even in the common".

17. तब ते चेत शोभ तेरे तर चेति लखरियाँ
तब ते अपेक्ष राकरौं तब मू रहत लखरियाँ
तब ते अपरापर न तेरे कदे लिखी तरी

18. नित निन्द मेरठ मेरठ मनो निंदः मनुष
मे मित तरजी मुलाशक फिर विच भर्जे गुरु
भक्त मितार भेदीः गृह भवान त भिन्नति ललितः

17. विनविन, नाम अनंत 1, प:417
18. विनविन, नाम अनंत 1, प:417
This period in the history of the Punjab was characterized by mass destruction and bloodshed. Tears of blood welled up in the eyes of Guru Nanak who saw havoc wrought by Babar as described in Rag-Tilang Mehla I:

"O Lalo, as I receive the word of the Lord, so do I utter; (Babar, the Mughal) hath come from Kabul with sin as his wedding-party, and asketh us by force to part with (our motherland, our daughter). Righteousness and sense of shame have hidden themselves, and falsehood walks abroad with abandon. The days of the Qazis and the Brahmins are over, Yea, the devil himself playeth the priest. The Muslim women read the Quran, and in misery pray to their God; And also pray thus to Him the Hindu women of all castes, Yea, the wedding song speaketh of blood, And with blood, not saffron, are the wedded ones anointed". 19

In the Var-Asa Mehala I, Guru Nanak has complained that people were so cowed down in spirit that they would pay homage to whosoever came to rule them:

Within, they worship (the idols); outside they read the Quran, and observe the code of the Turks. 20
Besides religious persecutions, the administration in the province was at the lowest ebb. The rulers were frolicking in wanton pleasures and romance and had lost all sense of duty towards the masses. Corruption was rife and there was degradation all around. "Corruption, degradation and teachery", according to Mohammed Latif, stalked through the land. Confusion and disorder of every kind ran riot over the length and breadth of the Empire. Murders of the most horrible type, robberies of the most outrageous and shocking character were the order of the day. Honour, justice and position were bought and sold. The rulers of the land were sunk in voluptuousness and pollution of the most revolting kind and were immersed in the abyss of enfeebling debauchery".  

In the words of Bhai Gurdas, "Those who posed as benefactors were busy in amassing wealth by all sinful means. Love between men and women was based on money and they met at pleasure and departed at will. The Qazis who occupied the seat of justice committed all types of crimes and administered justice only when bribed".

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Guru Nanak has described the woeful conditions of this period in the following poignant lines in *Majh-ki-Var*:

Kings are butchers, cruelty their knife,
justice has taken wing and fled,
Falsehood prevails and the moon of truth
is visible nowhere.
I have tired myself in searching about, but
in the darkness no path is visible.
The world is suffering an endless pain in egoism.
How shall it be saved? 23.

Guru Nanak, further, tells us in *Var Malhar Ki*:

The Kings are like leopards,
the courtiers like dogs,
For they awaken those that sleep in God's peace.
The king's servants tear (the docile subjects)
with their nails,
And, like curs, lick up all the blood
that they spill. 24

The Indian society at that time was divided into two major sections, the Hindus and the Muslims. The Muslims were the favoured children of the State, whereas the Hindus were treated as 'pariahs'. The Hindus paid various taxes, such as 'jaziya' and pilgrimage tax. Their internal state was the most deplorable. The worst thing among the Hindus was their factions.
They were in the clutches of a rigid caste-system. The Brahmins, though quite submissive to their Muslim neighbours, were tyrannical to the Sudras. The discriminating treatment meted out by the higher classes is best depicted by Namdev, who being pushed out from a temple, where only high castes could worship, cried out, "This Brahmin calls me a low-caste, and calling me a Sudra, he beats me out". Kabir also said, "How art thou a Brahmin? How am I a Sudra? How am I of blood and how art thou of milk?"

The position occupied by women in the society at that time was very degrading. They had no individuality of their own. They were domestic slaves and were confined to their homes and hearths. The birth of a girl was considered inauspicious. Female infanticide was quite common. The girls were generally married at a very young age and polygamy was in vogue among the rich. Prostitution was rampant and the institution of dancing-girls was lucrative enough and was patronized by those who were, paradoxically, the custodians of the public morals. Widow remarriage was tabooed and the custom of 'Sati' was in vogue.

25. तू मुझे तरह तरह छुएकर मुझे अनंत अनंत छोड़ दे। 
26. अगर सुनो वह सुनो अगर सुनो।
The purdah-system, which had been brought into India by Mohammedans, was prevalent.

The Muslims were in no way better than the Hindus. They were divided into three classes, the upper, the lower and the slaves. The upper class such as the 'Amirs' and the 'Maulanas' were united in times of war, but in times of peace they gave themselves up to sensual pleasures. The lower classes comprised the peasantry and the minor officials. They were not equal in status to the upper classes, but were still better than the Hindus. At the lowest rung of the Muslim society were the slaves. But even to them, sometimes, a better treatment was given than to the Hindus. Whereas character and restraint were at the lowest ebb among the upper classes, religious fanaticism prevailed among all the three classes.

In the sphere of religion, the social standards had fallen to the lowest depths, as pointed out by Bhai Gurdas in his Var 1. "Apart from unsurmountable barriers existing between the Hindus and the Muslims, there were inner dissensions in their ranks. They were torn apart by mutual jealousies and false sense of religious pride. Forgetting the basic tenets of their respective religions, the Hindus of the Vedas and the Muslims of the Quran, they were bogged down in empty rituals. Frequent clashes between the Pandits
and the Mullahs were recurrent". The Qazi occupied the seat of justice, but he retained only an outward show of religion and would not desist from passing unjust orders. The Brahmin was a hypocrite. He pretended to be pure and catholic but in real life he was impure and intolerant. The 'Vairagis' and the 'Sanyasis' had not actually renounced the world. While keeping up only the exterior semblance of Yogis, they, in fact, exploited and misguided the innocent people. According to Namdev, "The Hindus are blind, the Muslims purblind... the Hindus worship their temples and the Muslims their mosques".

According to Dr Gokal Chand Narang, "The popular religion at the time of Nanak's birth was confined to peculiar forms of eating and drinking, peculiar ways of bathing and painting the forehead and other such mechanical observances". The religious literature of the Hindus written in Sanskrit was naturally beyond the comprehension of the common man. The

27. जन हत्त कश्य भनेन लग विच विचू भनन।

28. Narang, Gokal Chand, Dr, Transformation of Sikhism, pp. 19-20
evil of casteism had rendered the majority of Indian population untouchables. The complicated rituals and ceremonies entailed heavy expense, which a common man could not afford. Islam, as opposed to it, was comparatively simple and preached faith in one God, one brotherhood within the community and no faith in caste-system. On the social side, its most impressive feature was the assertion of the equality and brotherhood of Muslims and, hence, the absence of a priestly class. The doctrine of unity of God implied the complete rejection of the worship of deities or the adoration of idols. Thus Islam made itself attractive to the low-caste Hindus, as it was within the reach of the common man. Originally, it was a pure and simple religion, but with the passage of time, it imbibed some of the unhealthy Hindu influences and consequently the holy classes of 'Shaikhs' and the 'Sayyids' were created in Islam. 'Pirs', 'Faqirs' and Quran began to be worshipped.29

The socio-political, economic and religious conditions in the fifteenth century and in the early part of the sixteenth century prepared the ground for the revival of the Bhakti Movement and ultimately for the rise of the Sikh religion in India. There is a fascinating analogy between the spiritual, economic cum political conditions of Europe and India during the Dark Ages. A great cycling wave of reformation overspread

29. Tara Chand, Dr, Influence of Islam on Indian Culture, p.51.
both the continents. Both in Europe and India, men shook off the dust of complacency and awoke to the challenging realities. When Martin Luther and Calvin in Europe were propagating against the abuses and irregularities of the Church, several Indian saints, such as Kabir, Chaitanya, Vallabhacharya, Shankar Dev, Ravi Das, Sain Das, and Sur Das were denouncing priestcraft, hypocrisy and idolatry. Starting from the South, the movement travelled to the North and ultimately reached the Punjab. The essentials of the Bhakti Movement were monotheism, brotherhood of men, meditation, adoration of the guru or guru-bhakti, self-surrender, and castelessness. Dr Ishwari Prasad writes, "The Bhakti Movement first made its appearance in the shape of religious reform, like Buddhism and Jainism as a reaction against the ritualistic religion of the Vedas... and it was based upon the teachings of the <i>Bhagwat-Gita</i>. Vasudeva Krishna, like the Buddha and the Mahavira in the Buddhist and Jain systems, was the originator of this reform". The early name of this movement, however, says Dr Bhandarkar, was 'Ekanti Ka Dharma', i.e. religion of single-mindedness.

But these reformers appeared to have been so much impressed with the nothingness of this life that they deemed the amelioration of man's social conditions as unworthy of

31. Ishwari Prasad, Dr, <i>History of Medieval India</i>, p.559.
contemplation. Ramanand, whose movement gave a powerful stimulus to Hindu revival in Benaras, could not shake off the theory of incarnation and added to the number of existing sects by confirming his homage to Rama. Nor were his followers freed from the bondage of external forms. Gorakhnath attempted to penetrate the crust of external forms and ceremonies by teaching the occult science of Yoga, but even he could not escape the narrowing influence of sectarianism. The second reason for these movements not sufficiently contributing to the national progress is to be found in the other-worldly character of almost everyone of them. With the exception of Vallabhbacharya, every leader held renunciation of the world as the highest virtue. Ramanand, Gorakh, Kabir and Chaitanya were all impressed with the nothingness of this life. They perfected forms of dissent rather than planting the germs of a nation and their sects have remained to this day, as they left them.  

It was Nanak, who for the first time introduced a true principle of reform and laid the foundations on which Guru Gobind Singh raised a new nation.

According to Sir Charles Gough, "Guru Nanak penetrated beneath the crust of observances and conventions and found the root of the matter in the unity of God and equality of man before him". Pincott says, "These two ideas, the unity of God and

32. Narang, Gokal Chand, Dr, Transformation of Sikhism, p.21.
the brotherhood of man, while uniting all classes on a common basis, at the same time separated those who accepted them from the rest of their countrymen as an association of God-fearing republicans, for what Nanak claimed was liberty from prescribed trammels, equality before God and the fraternity of mankind. The practical application of the doctrines thus taught led to the formation of a new nation. The disciples of the great teacher became a republican fraternity which gradually consolidated into a separate nation. 34