CHAPTER XI

THE CASTE-SYSTEM AND THE SIKH GURUS

DEVELOPMENT

India is generally known as the classic land of castes and creeds. The institution of caste, which has come to stay as a permanent feature of the social life of the Hindus, dates back to the remote past.

The Vedic Aryans, who were a branch of the Indo-European people, had early developed the exclusive spirit of social behaviour and had cultivated a partiality for ideas of ceremonial purity. They refused to mix with the conquered who were dark-complexioned. Their first regulation was to exclude the Sudras (a class largely formed by the aborigines) from their religious worship. Very early in the Indian history, the Aryans enjoined that the Sudra would not practise the religious worship which they had evolved. They even forbade their presence in the sacrificial hall. A Sudra male's attempt at marrying a Brahmin female was considered an act of the greatest sacrilege against society. The Aryans excluded them even from other religious and social functions. Hence we can conclude that caste in India is a Brahmanic child of the Indo-Aryan culture, cradled in the land of the Ganga and the Yamuna and then transplanted into other parts of the country.

1. Majumdar, R.C., Pusalkar, A.D. Dr, The Vedic Age, p.385.
2. Majumdar, D.N., Races and Cultures of India, pp.289-318.
However, in the Rig-Vedic period there were no rigid divisions among the Aryans. In the Brahmanic period, the four classes got regimented into rigid groups based on birth. As arts and crafts grew in number and complexity, castes based on occupation came into being.

**BASIS OF CASTE-SYSTEM**

There is a twofold basis of group division among the Hindus, the 'varna' and the 'jati'. The former is God-ordained, primeval and eternal, whereas the latter is a system of groups within the 'varna'. The basic principle of varna is that the division of the Hindu society into four classes is innate and cannot be challenged. The Rig-Veda in the ninetieth hymn of the tenth book authenticates this classification as follows: "When they divided man, how many did they make him? What was his mouth? What his arms? What are called his thighs and feet?" And the answers to these questions follow: "The Brahma was His mouth, the Rajanya was made from His arms, the Vaisaya became His thighs, and the Sudra was born from His feet".

While the varna is based on innate and predestined differences, the jati is primarily functional and stands for certain civil and religious duties to be performed in the social group in which one is born. This is implied by the term

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Varanashramdharma. Its implication is that 'dharma' is not the same for all, though, indeed, there is a common 'dharma' valid for everybody. But there is also a 'dharma' for each class, each group and each stage of the life of a person. The 'dharma' of the man of high birth is different from that of a common man. This principle of Varanashramdharma which inspires and validates the social stratification of 'jati' is laid down by Manu. "He, the Resplendent, for the sake of protecting all the creatures, assigned separate duties to those born of his mouth, arms, thighs and feet. Teaching and studying the Vedas, making sacrifices and assisting others in so doing, making gifts and receiving the gifts; these he assigned to the Brahmans. The protection of the people, giving gifts, the study of the Vedas, non-attachment to sensual pleasures, these he prescribed for the Kasatriyas. The protection of the cattle, sacrificing, trade, banking and agriculture to the Vaishyas. The God allotted only one duty to the Sudras; to serve without demur the members of all the classes mentioned above". 5 Manu warns that if this social and economic apartheid is not respected, the dogs and the crows would swallow up the sacred materials of the sacrifices, the gods would withdraw their favours and the human society would disintegrate.

The Bhagvat-Gita stresses that "one's own avocation is better, howsoever defective, for in performing that which is

his preordained obligation, one incurs no sin".  

Whatever the intentions, the caste-system infused a false sense of pride in the 'twice-born' people and led to the humiliation and persecution of the lower classes. When inordinate formalism vitiated and distorted the early scheme, protests were voiced by Jainism and Buddhism. They repudiated the superiority of the Brahmans. The Buddhist order was open to men, irrespective of their classes and castes. But this does not imply that the Buddha was averse to the caste-system or did not believe that men were divided into categories determined by their deeds in previous births. Though Buddhism denied the superiority of the Brahmans, yet it was not critical of the caste-system. The essence of caste is that inequality of birth has a divine sanction and the Hindu social organization has a religious basis, which was never challenged by the Buddha.

It is sometimes alleged that the Lingayats and the Vaishnayas assailed the Hindu caste-system, but this is far from true. According to Ramanuja, all souls are of the same nature in so far as they are of the same substance as God, nevertheless some men are entitled to read the Vedas and others are not. All fire, he added, is of the same nature, but the

fire taken from the house of a Brahman is pure, whereas that taken from the cremation ground is impure. The soul is defiled by being associated with a low caste.  

FERMENT OF SOCIAL REFORMATION

The movement for social reformation in medieval India brought in its train a galaxy of reformers and saints, such as Ramanand, Chaitanya, Kabir, Dadu, Namdev, Tuka Ram, Ram Dass, Vallabhacharya, Pipa and Tulsi Dass. These saints along with many Muslim Sufi saints from the North fought vigorously against the entrenched caste-system and promoted the uplift of the downtrodden. They imparted the message of brotherhood and equality of mankind and proclaimed that all religions and men were alike. 

Ramanand's views on the subject of caste-system are embodied in a hymn in the Guru Granth that "in the final reckoning the caste has no relevance; God owns all those who love Him". This is precisely the teaching of the Bhagvat-Gita and it does not repudiate the caste-system.

Kabir, Pipa and Ravi Dass (the cobbler), whose hymns also find place in the Guru Granth are among the top twelve followers of Ramanand. Vallabhacharya and Chaitanya gave their own

definitions of the essence of religious activity open to all castes without distinction, but nowhere did they challenge the caste-system. Thus the caste-system arrested the growth of homogeneity among the Hindus and retarded the further advance of the people on the road to democratic ideals and led to socio-political stagnation.

CONTENTIONS OF THE GURUS

The Sikh Gurus denounced the religious sanction behind birth distinctions and refused to admit that there were any divinely ordained classes and castes among mankind. They denied that social gradation could determine social ethics and emphatically declared that class and caste distinctions were meaningless. Men were not created from the different parts of the Primeval Being, as stated by Manu. The Gurus contended that all had their origin in one source, the Divine Radiance and, as such, were equal in the eyes of the Supreme Being and the caste barriers were man-made.

The Sikh religion is very simple and can be conveniently summed up in four words, i.e., unity, equality, faith and service. It is a religion of humanity, aiming at uniting the whole world into one common brotherhood, without distinctions of caste, creed or colour. Sikhism lays emphasis on the unity of God-head. Bhai Jodh Singh says "brotherhood of man is the

12. Ishwari Prasad, Dr, A Short History of Muslim Rule In India, pp.198-202.
necessary outcome of the unity of the Godhead". 13

The Gurus' contention that all men have descended from
the same Being and, hence, there is none high or low, is
borne out by the following hymns of the Gurus:

O Lord, Thou art the True Master,
the entire Universe overflows with
thy creation.

The lowest of the lowly, the lowest of
the low-born, Nanak seeks their company.
The friendship of the great is vain.

For, where the weak are cared for,
there doth thy mercy rain. 14

Sri Rag, M.I

As light permeates the rays of the sun,
so doth God permeate every being,
warp and woof. 15

Rag Basant, M.IV

As fire is contained in all timber,
and butter in all milk,
So the light of God is contained in
everything, high and low; He is
in the hearts of all living things. 16

Sonar, M.V, Dopada, I

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14. afar atefa
15. SRI HED, M 1, p: 15
16. SRI HED, M 4, p: 1177
First, God Created His Light:
and from His Power were all men made:
Yea, from God's light came the whole Universe:
So, whom shall we call good, whom bad?
O men, be not strayed by doubt, for,
the Creator is in the created, and the created
in the Creator, who filleth all, all over.
The clay is the same, but fashioned
in a myriad shapes:
So, it availeth not to find fault either
with the clay-vessels, or with the potter, who mouldeth them, each in a different way.

Prabhati, Kabir

By the union of the father and the mother
two persons are born and they propagate two
different ways of life.
The Hindus call him 'Ram' and the Muslims
call him 'Allah'.
The Hindus make obeisance to the east
and the Muslims bows to the west.
They have their four Vedas.
The other have their four books.
They have the four varnas,
whereas the others have the four sects.
Both were born of the five elements.
Coming from one place they call themselves
by different names. 18

Bhai Gurdas, Var. 33

17. भारी भवन तुह बौद्धिकर बुधाते से मध बहे
भूत नूब च सम नव बौद्धिकर फुटह जूठ ने मधे
भेंछ अफाल र कुचु जूठी
पश्चिम अधिक धर्म पुरुष जीर्ण बृहस्पती
भूतानी, रणी, प. 1349

18. हृद तिलक मो चूट नरे उव नाटक पुरुष जूठामह
विंदु अश्व जान जन पृथक हृद पुरुष
विरह विनुविनु गृह विनुविनु गृह विनुविनु गृह
सेल सैंकु नरू जूठ जन सैंकु नरू जूठ जूठ
सेल नूबन नूब जूठ जन जूठ जूठ जूठ
भी उद ताते नरे बुद बुद बुद बुद
जूठ जूठ जूठ जूठ पुरुष

जूठी ज्ञानम, वर, 33, पृष्ठी 2
Some become cleanshaven 'Sanyasis', others 'Yogis'. Some 'Brahmcharis' and some consider themselves 'Jatis'. Some Hindus, some Mohammedans, Rafzis or Shias, but understand, the race of the man is the same. 'Karta' and 'Karim' are the same. He is 'Razak' and 'Rahim'. Don't believe even by mistake that there is any difference between them. The Gurdeva of all is one. All have the same form and the light in them is also the same. 19

Akal-Ustat, Guru 10

The Hindu temple and the mosque are the same. 'Pooja' and 'Namaz' are the same. All men are the same but they look different. The distinctions among the gods, the demons, the Yakshas, the Gandharvas are all due to their residence in different regions. They have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body and the same build. All are composed of earth, air, fire, water and ether. 'Allah' and 'Abbekh' are the same. The Purans and the Quran are the same. All have got

19. ਹੁਣੋਂ ਮੁੱਖ ਮਂਦਿਰਾਂ ਤੇਜੁਹੀ ਤਖਤੋ ਹੋ ਹੁਣੋਂ ਹੁਣ ਮੁੱਖ ਮਂਦਿਰਾਂ ਤੇ ਕਰਮ ਮਹੀ ਹੋ ਵਧ ਵਧ ਕੇ ਲੋ ਦੇ ਪਹਾਣ ਵਧ ਵਧ ਕੇ ਲੋ ਦੇ ਪਹਾਣ ਵਧ ਵਧ ਕੇ ਲੋ ਦੇ ਪਹਾਣ ਵਧ ਵਧ ਕੇ ਲੋ ਦੇ ਪਹਾਣ 

ਤੇਜੁਹੀ ਸੁੰਦਰ ਸੰਸਾਰ ਦੇ ਲੋ ਲੋ ਦੇ ਪਹਾਣ ਵਧ ਵਧ ਕੇ ਲੋ ਦੇ ਪਹਾਣ 

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ਤੇਲਾ ਸੀਮਰਾਜ ਬੀ.10, ਪ.82
the same form and the same constitution. 20

Akal-Ustat, Guru 10

Sparks of the same fire, millions of sparks fly from one fire, they become separate and again merge in it. From dust millions of particles fly, but these particles again unite with dust. In one river millions of waves arise. All waves of water are called water. All forms, all living beings, come out of Him and they return to Him again. 21

Akal-Ustat, Guru 10

20. इश्वर भगवान ने दी बुद्धि के अभाव हीं
अता सब लोग इस जगत पर भूषण के हैं।
किसी मज़े नई बृहस्पति उलझ निजी
रूप से उपर आग कितनी हो हैं
इसलिए इसे धन्य बांधे धन्य बोल धन्य है।
कहते हैं 'चक्की' के नाम हैं
जिन्हें नीचे गुजरते हैं।
उनके सब धन्य बुद्धि गुजरते हैं
इसलिए इसी सब हैं
बना है।

अवल डाइरज़, प: 10, प: 83

21. अब इश्वर जगते नेल टेट जगत हैं
रूप से उपर आग जब निजी
ईश्वर देश पर कितना चक्की गुजरते हैं
पर उसके नीचे नया धन्य है।
ईश्वर जगते नेल टेट डाइरज़ हैं
उसके नीचे बना है।
ईश्वर जगते नेल टेट गुजरते हैं
इसलिए इसी सब हैं
बना है।

अवल डाइरज़, प: 10, प: 84
The religious belief as enunciated by Manu entitled only the 'twice-born' to meditate and reap the fruits of meditation. In a way, they and they alone were entitled to attain salvation. The low-born were debarred from meditating on His Name and the right to salvation was denied to them. The Sikh Gurus made a palpable departure from this beaten track and broke fresh ground. Their trumpet call was that Dharma was one for all. The following hymns illustrate this truth:

Contemplating the Lord, men of low caste attained a high station.22

*Rag Suhi, M.IV*

Let any of the four castes repeat His Name. And he who utters it, is saved.23

*Gauri Sukhmani, M.V*

Whether one is a Kshatriya, a Brahmin, a Shudra, or a Vaishya, all these but swim across through the Lord's Name.24

*Rag Mary, M.V*

22. ठीक सरूँ जरि नमभर दिउ उच चरदो गादि
   मुरार भक्त ४, प्र: 733

23. धेर भए भए भए विशु चन चन भए चन चन चन
    ते ते ते ते ते चन चन चन चन चन चन
   जहूँ जहूँ मुखचन भक्त ५, प्र: 274

24. वर्षो मृस्त मृत मृत मृत मृत उतखस
    कसो आराम दिउ उच उच उच
   जहूँ जहूँ दिउ उच उच उच
   जहूँ जहूँ भक्त ५, प्र: 1001
Whether he be a Brahmin or a Vaishya,  
a Kshatriya or a Shudra—yea, even  
if he be a chandal of an unclean mind.  
He become immaclate and pure,  
contemplating his God, he saveth  
himself, and all who belong to him.  

Rag Bilaval, Bani Ravidas

The Sikh Gurus demolished the very superstructure of the  
caste-system. They waged a relentless war against the  
superstitions relating to 'varan,' 'jati' and other caste  
classifications.

Vain is the pride of caste,  
vain the pride of glory,  
the Lord alone giveth shade to all.  

Var Sri Rag, M.I

Appreciate the light, do not ask the caste,  
there is no caste hereafter.  

Rag Asa, M.I

Some wear skins, others take to the begging bowl,  
others to the yogi's staff, others to a dervish's skin,  
while some but raise the tuft of hair,  
and wear the sacred thread,  
and tuck up the lion cloth (the Brahmin way),  
O Lord, thou art my Master, I am a  
player of many parts prayeth Nanak:  
'O Lord, how can (my garb) determine my caste.'

Rag Asa, M.I

25. ध्यान रूप से वर धर्म धर्म धर्म स्त्रिया देवी ।  
पुष्प खोज अकेला जाते हैं जहाँ जहां जाते हैं ।  
क्रुद्दिक्रुद्द महान ज्योति, पृः ८५८

26. भरो तनो भरो भरो भरो भरो तूम दिखा छइन ।  
मिलिये, म १, प ८३

27. भरो तनो भरो भरो भरो भरो भरो भरो भरो ।  
मिलिये, म १, प ३४९

28. अध्यात्म ध्यात्म ध्यात्म ध्यात्म ध्यात्म ध्यात्म ।  
मिलिये, म १, प ३५८
Hereafter goeth neither caste nor colour with thee,
And thou comest as are they deeds. 29

Bhai Gurdas, Var, I

Hinduism and Islam were the two dominant religions at that time. Their followers were hostile to each other. The Sikh Gurus, who believed in the unity of the Godhead and brotherhood of man, preached the gospel of fraternity and love. They tried to remove mutual enmity, doubts and superstitions of the people and asked them to live like brothers.

He to whom the two ways are revealed as one, is blessed; But he who believes not (in it) burns in his own inner fire.
Blessed is the whole world (if it) abideth in the truth. 31

Bhai Gurdas, M.III

29. जब्र न्म अंग क नमित,
    जेन तेह तवेह तथा अमृत

Bhai Gurdas, M. I, p: 363

30. जर वर वर से बन बाब दिस बन बाब रण
    अनि बन बुध बाब रण जान

Bhai Gurdas, Var 1, p: 23

31. जर तेह दिस सर नाम मैले मिलम
    बुध बाब बुध बाब रण मम
    महु दुर्लभ मुखप्र पांच समरीहै

Bhai Gurdas, Var 1, p: 142
The ways are two, but the Lord (of both) is one:
Yea, realize it through His will, through the word.  

Gauri, M.I

Some but call Thee 'Rama', while by others
Thou art known as 'Khuda'.
Yea, some serve Thee as 'Gosain', others as 'Allah'.
But, O Beneficent Lord, Thou art only the one Doer and Cause.
So bless me Thou with Thy mercy.

Ram Kali, M.V

He abides in all hearts all over, and His wonders
are unanalysable and make one wonder.
O Creator-Lord, be merciful to me,
And bless me with Thy devotion.
Sayeth Nanak: "The Guru hath rid me of my doubt:
And now I see Allah and the Transcendent Brahma as one."

Ram Kali, M.V

I've turned my mind away (from maya) and
abandoned the profession of my caste and family
And, now I weave (nothing but God) in the void of poise.
Yea, I've abandoned all my strife,
For, abandoned have I both the Pandit and the Mullah.

Bhaino, Kabir

32. लज़ यहें भगवान के लिए पतझड़ रख दें महामाया का निकाय
मध्य में कुछ बक्सा भला मनोहर तब सिखना।
भातीय भगवान 1, प: 223

33. वेदी के तम रजा लोग भाग देंगे पुराण वेदी पूजा के लिए कुछ पूजा भरें अपनी
वेदियों अनेक में निकल पाए वालों भें अभ्यास जाएं जैसे वेदी जा न लिये
जो जी हो, भगवान 5, प: 885

34. खजित तत्त्व सत्त्व सत्त्व भला रजा के न पाए साहित्य समझे सहित लिख लिखे त लिये
मिश्रित साहित्य लिख, उकसाया जा घटक भक्त अद्वैत भक्त निश्चरण
अव रामु जिके पैड़े रघु से रघु जोत प्रमुख नुकमा
जो जी हो, भगवान 5, प: 897

35. अव रामु जिके पैड़े पौड़िक पुकूर लखे उद्योग
पौड़िक पुकूर से लिखे दोहे छोटे रघु कुड़ा दोहे
जेतें रघुनाथ, प: 1158
The idea of race and family has been responsible for preventing mankind from mixing together. Racial or family pride brought about great havoc on mankind. The Sikh Gurus who aimed at levelling down these distinctions spoke openly about the futility of these distinctions, and condemned social inequalities, caste and creed distinctions and untouchability.

**PRINCIPLES OF THE GURUS IN PRACTICE**

This message of all-embracing brotherhood and equality was not limited to thought alone. The Sikh Gurus translated these principles into action and there was no gulf left between practice and precept. The pages of Sikh History are replete with such examples.

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was an apostle of love, equality and brotherhood. He was born when the times were out of joint. Social injustice and caste prejudices were the order of the day. The corrupt rulers were drunk with power and there existed a yawning gulf between them and the subjects. In such a world, Guru Nanak preached the gospel of universal love and brotherhood to create a casteless society. God-intoxicated Nanak moved from place to place to propagate the divine message. Repudiating the caste-system, the Guru refused to receive the 'janeu', the sacred thread, from Hardial, the family priest. The Guru asked him the significance of wearing the 'janeu'. Hardial told him that it was the totem of Hindu religion. Guru Nanak rejected the views put forward by the Pandit and thus spoke:
Make me mercy thy cotton, contentment thy thread, continence its knot, truth its twist.
That would make a 'janeu' for the soul; in case thou hast it, O Brahman, then put it on me.
It will not break, or become soiled, or be burnt, or lost. Blest is the man, O Nanak, who goeth with such a thread on his neck.
Thou purchasest a 'janeu' for four 'damris', and seated in a square puttest it on. 36

Var Asa, M.I

Guru Nanak told the Qazi at Sultanpur that there was no Hindu and no Musalman. 37 The Qazi represented against his statement to the Governor Daulat Khan, who summoned Guru Nanak and asked him what his utterances implied? The Guru said:

To be a Musalman is difficult; if one be really so, then one may be called a Musalman.
Let one first love the religion of saints, and put aside pride and pelf as the file removeth rust.
Let him accept the religion of his pilots, and dismiss anxiety regarding death or life;
Let him heartily obey the will of God, worship the Creator, and efface himself.

When he is kind to all men,
then Nanak, shall he be indeed a Muslimān.38

Majh ki Var, M.I

His mission was not aimed at the reformation of a particular class or sect. Nor were his travels confined to Punjab, the Land of the Five Rivers. Despite hardships, he practically travelled across the whole of the Indian Subcontinent and even visited places beyond its frontiers. His visits were limited not only to the Hindu places of worship, like Hardwar and Benaras, but he went to famous places of Muslim pilgrimage like the holy Mecca, Madina and Baghdad also.

In his oddysseys or wanderings, he mixed with the poor and the untouchable as readily as with the kings and the priests. He gave preference to the lowly and the downtrodden. Bhai Mardana, the life-long companion of Guru Nanak was a 'Mirasi', a low-caste bard. Mardana was of the tribe of 'Dums', who are traditional minstrels.40

38. नमस्कर राजा मार नमस्कर न देवता ज नमस्कर राजा,
बलमक शिरिक चौक तर सिध नमस्कार भर निकहं निकहं नेव ज्योत बरस तो करमें वही निर देउ अदाल में जय आदे अदेन तर मव मो मो निरज मा नमस्कार अदाले।

भाग देभ राज, भाग 1, प: 141

Guru Nanak rejected the invitation to a sumptuous feast given by Malik Bhago and chose to stay with Bhai Lalo, a humble carpenter of Saidpur. This act of the Guru brought into focus his sympathy and love for the poor and the downtrodden and is symbolic of the denunciation of the caste-system.  

While at Hardwar, the Guru required fire to cook his meal. He sent Mardana to a Brahmin. Mardana stepped into a Brahmin's cooking-square. The Brahmin charged Mardana with the defiling of his food. Exposing the caste-system, the Guru made the utterance: "Evil conscience is the 'duni', want of mercy, the 'kasain', backbiting, the sweepess and anger the 'chandal' (out-caste). These are ever-abiding with thee, O Brahmin, what use is there to draw boundary lines around thy purified cooking-floor"?  

Once a fanatical Brahmin came to the Guru and begged for alms. The Guru was having his meal and he invited the Brahmin to join him. The Brahmin told him that he would not partake of the food cooked by others and added that he would eat only what he had cooked himself. The Guru was against such futile formalities, but he gave uncooked articles to the Brahmin to cook for himself. The Brahmin went away and started digging the earth to make a cooking-square. But wherever he dug, he

41. Khushwakat Rai, Tavarikh-i-Ahval-i-Sikhan, MS.f.5.  
42. Meharban, Sodhi, Jahan Sakhi (Pothi Sach-khand) Gost, 41-42.
found only bones. Tired and overcome by hunger, the Brahmin went to the Guru and asked for the cooked food which he had previously rejected. The Guru brought home to the Brahmin the futility of his beliefs and made him realize the importance of uttering, and meditating on God's Name. 43

During his visit to Ceylon, Raja Sivanabh asked him his name as well as his caste. 44 The Guru dispelled his doubts and repudiated these distinctions by saying that a real Brahmin was he who had the knowledge of God's pervading spirit. By concentrating on one God, one could overcome the waverings of one's mind. The Guru was accompanied by Saido and Gheho, of the Jat caste, in his journey to the South, and Hassu, a blacksmith, and Sihan, a Calico-printer, in his journey to the North. 45

When Guru Nanak visited Mecca, the 'Qazis' and the 'Mullahs' enquired of him as to which of the two religions was superior — Hinduism or Islam. The Guru replied that the professors of both the religions would suffer if their deeds were not virtuous. Both sects are jealous of each other. The Hindus insist on saying 'Ram' and the Muslims, 'Rahim', but they know not God. The priest further asked him who would realize God, the Hindus who read the Vedas or the Muslims who read the Quran?

43. Vir Singh, Bhai (ed.), Puratan Janam Sakhi, Sakhi, 38.
44. Khushwakat Rai, Tawarikh-i-Ahwal-i-Sikhan, MS.f.5.
45. Vir Singh, Bhai (ed.), Puratan Janam Sakhi, Sakhi, 49.
The Guru told Qazi Rukun-ud-Din and Maulvi Abdul Rehman that the Vedas and the Quran were false and God only was the purest of the pure. At Baghdad, the high priest, Pir Dastgir, asked him who he was and to what sect he belonged. The Guru told him that he had rejected all sects and knew only one God.46

The Hindus and the Muslims both loved the Guru alike. When the Guru's end was drawing near, his Hindu followers declared that they would cremate his body whereas his Muslim friends declared to bury it. The Guru decided by asking the Hindus to place some flowers on the right of his dead body and the Muslims on the left of it, and said that they who found their flowers fresh the next morning could dispose of his body as they liked. When the sheet was removed, his body was not there. It had etherealized to merge into the Universal Soul from which it had first emanated. The flowers were found fresh the next morning on both the sides, reaffirming the brotherhood of man which was so dear to the Guru.47

The torch of love for humanity was kept burning by the successive Gurus who were the embodiment of Nanak's spirit. Guru Angad, like Guru Nanak, also repudiated distinction of caste and creed. During his visit to Harika, his Sikhs came to pay him homage. The owner of the village who had known the Guru

47. Vir Singh, Bhai(ed.), Puratan Janam Sakhi, Sakhi, 57.
earlier and was proud of his high caste, refused to pay respects to the Guru. The Sikhs read out to him slokas from the Asa-di-Var. This made his pride vanish. 48

Balwand and Satta, the two famous ministrels of Guru Angad, used to entertain the Sikhs with their vocal and instrumental music. They grew haughty and capricious with the passage of time and started boasting that it was because of their music that the Guru had become renowned. They refused to sing the hymns when asked by the Sikhs to do so. They argued that they would not sing the hymns to ordinary peasants. At their refusal, the Guru was annoyed and turned his back on the haughty ministrels, who eventually had to regret their foolish and haughty behaviour.

Guru Amar Dass enjoined upon his followers, irrespective of their position, caste or creed, to eat in the community kitchen, known as 'Guru ka Langar'. During his visit to the village of Dalla, Prithi Mal and Tulsa, of the Bhalla caste, went to see him. They tried to show that they were intimate with the Guru as he belonged to their caste. The Guru told them that caste did not matter at all in the next world, and only good actions could pave the way for salvation. 49 Only they were honoured in His Court who were humble and who had given up falsehood, fraud, slander, deceit, hypocrisy and ingratitude.

Bhai Malan, Ramu, Gobind and Dipa requested the Guru to enlighten them on the things that mattered in life. The Guru advised them not to recognize caste, not to hurt anybody's feelings, to abandon pride, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to sing the Guru's hymns, to be humble and to recognize the Creator only.

The rising prestige and the growing popularity of Guru Amar Dass was an eyesore to the Khatris and the Brahmins who were extremely proud of their caste. They lodged a complaint against the Guru with the Emperor that he had abandoned the religion and social customs of the Hindus and had abolished all caste distinctions. His followers sat together in a line in his kitchen, whether they were Jats or of any other caste, such as the strolling minstrels, Mohammedans, Brahmins, Khatris, sweepers, barbers, washermen, fishermen or carpenters.

The Emperor sent for the Guru who sent Bhai Jetha, his son-in-law, to represent him. Bhai Jetha was able to satisfy the Emperor that the Guru was not hostile to the Hindus. The Emperor, however, asked Bhai Jetha to request Guru Amar Dass on his behalf to make a pilgrimage to the Ganges to satisfy the Hindus and promised that no tax would be levied on the Guru's party. The Guru went to Pahoa, a place of pilgrimage near Thanesar or Kurkhetar, and the Brahmins were pleased to see him. He removed the doubts of the Pandits and brushed aside their

views that religious instructions were forbidden to women and the Sudras. 51

Murari, who was previously known as Prema and whom the Guru had blessed and cured of leprosy, became an ardent Sikh of the Guru. The Guru one day in the open 'durbar' asked his Sikhs whether any one of them was ready to give his daughter in marriage to Murari. A Sikh, called Sinha, stood up and offered his daughter Matho in marriage to him. The marriage was duly solemnized. When Sinha's wife heard of it, she came wailing to the Guru that the antecedents or caste or parentage of Murari were not known. The Guru said, "I am his father and mother and my caste is his caste".

Beni, a great scholar of the Vedas and Shastras vanquished the Pandits of all the great cities of India in polemics. In the course of his country-wide tours, he went to Goindwal and carried along with him his huge library. Guru Amar Dass received him warmly. The Pandit asked the Guru how the Sikhs who had abandoned the religious duties of the Hindus would be saved. The Guru told him that all rituals devoid of devotion were futile and asked him to shed his false pride and his notion of high caste and learning and to absorb his mind in devotion to God.

The fourth Guru, Ram Dass, was also cast in the mould of his illustrious predecessors. He also condemned empty rituals and false ceremonies. He worked for the brotherhood of mankind and upheld the ideals espoused by Guru Nanak. Sri Chand, the elder son of Baba Nanak, came to see Guru Ram Dass. When he reached the suburbs of Goindwal, the Guru went to receive him with reverence and offered him sweets and five hundred rupees. In the course of conversation, Baba Sri Chand asked the Guru why he had grown a long beard. The Guru replied that he had grown it to wipe off the dust of his (Sri Chand's) feet with it and bent down to do so. Sri Chand felt abashed and drew back his feet.53

The teachings of Guru Ram Dass were so effective that people of every class and religion flocked to him to hear his discourses. Several persons, including the Tapa (a contemporary ascetic of the Guru) became jealous of his fame. The Tapa said that it was a terrible age, the 'Kalyug', for he, who bore cold and heat, was not respected by the people in preference to the Guru who, a married man, was leading a life of comfort. One day, he went in a very agitated mood to the Guru and remonstrated with him about his Sikhs being so conceited that they did not accept the Vedas and the Quran, observed no fasts, went on no pilgrimages, observed no caste rules and other religious

duties. They only uttered 'Wahguru' and were misguided and thus wasted their lives. The Guru convinced him that it was his own mind that was completely befogged with pride.

Seven Sikhs, named Dharam Dass, Dugar Dass, Dipa, Jetha, Sansari, Bula and Tirath sought the Guru's grace to get salvation. The Guru initiated them into new mode of thought and exposed the hollowness of the caste-system.

Guru Ram Dass had undertaken the digging of tanks at Santokhsar and Amritsar. He also founded the City of Amritsar. This work was completed with the help of his dedicated Sikhs, who worked day and night, and collected funds for their completion in the lifetime of Guru Arjan Dev. The foundation-stone of the Golden Temple at Amritsar was laid by the great Muslim saint Mian Mir. It was a gesture of immense good-will and of far-reaching implications. It reveals the Guru's large-heartedness and catholicity of vision. When the tank was dug, the Sikhs requested the Guru that the Harimandar (the Golden Temple) be built in the middle of the tank and it should be higher than all other buildings in the neighbourhood. The Guru, who was an embodiment of humility, told his Sikhs: 'What is humble shall be exalted' and said that the Harimandar should be the lowest edifice of all. The Hindu temples are closed on three sides and are open only towards the east. The Guru ordered that the

Sikh temples were to be open on all the four sides, signifying that worship was open to all human beings.  

Guru Arjan, the Fifth Master, who had already given the Sikh faith its Mecca in the form of the Harimandar, compiled the Guru Granth and gave the Sikh faith its Bible. It was a task of great magnitude and of abiding spiritual, cultural and literary value. His catholicity and democratic temper found expression in the concept of the Guru Granth. The Guru Granth contains the teachings of the first five Gurus, some hymns of the ninth Guru and a couplet of the Tenth Guru, slokas and hymns of sixteen saints, namely Jaidev, Namdev, Tarlochan, Parmanand, Sadna, Beni, Rama Nand, Dhamma, Pipa, Sain, Kabir, Ravi Dass, Mian Bak, Farid, Bhikan and Sur Dass and the panegyrics sung by seventeen Bhatas, namely Mathura, Jalap, Babal, Harbans, Tulya, Salya, Jalya, Bhai, Kalsahar, Kal, Jal, Nal, Kirat, Dass, Gayand, Sadrang, and Bhiku. Some of the panegyrics sung by Mardana, Satta and Balwand have also been incorporated into the Granth. A portion of the Rag Mala, which is the concluding hymn of the Guru Granth, contains the great work of a Mohammedan poet, called Alim. Farid was a Mohammedan, while Kabir, though born of Mohammedan parents, was a Hindu by faith. Jai Dev, Trilochan, Sur Dass and Ramanand were Brahmins.

Pipa, a Raja, Bhikham and Beni of unknown castes, Dhanna, a Jat, and the other four, namely Namdev, a calico-printer; Sain, a barber; Sadna, a butcher; and Ravidas a cobbler, were of the Sudra class. According to the Hindu Religion, it was considered a great sin to listen to the teachings of Muslims and Sudras. Guru Arjan repudiated this belief and showed that every good man was worthy of honour irrespective of caste, creed and colour.

It is recorded in Dabistan-i-Mazahib that a youth was unhappy at caste restrictions imposed by Hinduism and wanted to embrace Islam. One Partap Mall Giani advised him to embrace Sikhism, if he wanted to be above distinctions of untouchability and if he was inclined to eat everything. This episode speaks volumes and reveals that Guru Nanak's mission was free from all distinctions of caste and creed. Fascinated by Guru Hargobind's teachings, the members of different castes and creeds flocked to him, Mian Meer, a Muslim divine of the period; Kaulan, a daughter of the Qazi of Lahore; Wazir Khan, Budhan Shah, Babek (a rebeck-player) and many others were the Muslim admirers of Guru Hargobind, in addition to many Muslims who joined the Guru in his wars against the imperial forces.

58. Mohsan Fani, Dabistan-i-Mazahib, p.239.
Guru Har Rai, like his predecessors, was also against distinctions of caste, creed and colour. A devoted Sikh lady, Bridhan, prepared with her own hands loaves of bread for the Guru and stood at a place from where the Guru passed daily. One day, the Guru came and asked for the loaves which she had cooked. The Guru ate them while on horseback. The woman was very happy and paid compliments to the Guru for his humility in accepting her humble fare. The Sikhs were surprised to see the Guru partaking of food offered by an unknown low-caste woman. The next day, they took sweet cakes and offered them to the Guru. The Guru told them that he ate food from the hands of that old lady, because she was a pious and devoted lady and had prepared the food with love and devotion.60

Guru Gobind Singh gave a grand feast at Anandpur to celebrate the Baisakhi festival. He invited all the people who had assembled there, but Kesho Brahmin was somehow left. He, however, sent for him when everybody had taken food. Kesho angrily refused his invitation and said that he would not eat the food which was left after the low-caste people had been fed. The Guru smiled and in a beautiful quatrain, full of sweet irony, told the Brahmin that one would get whatsoever was ordained by God. Therefore he should not worry. He further told him not to call these people low-caste but should see them

through his eyes. "Through the favour of them I won all my battles. Through the favour of them, a host of sins could not overpower me. Through their favour, I got my education. I owe my present position to them, otherwise there are millions of poor people like me. The service of these people delights me as it will bear fruit hereafter. In my house, my body, and my wealth are all theirs". 61

When Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa on the first of Baisakh, Samvat 1756 (A.D. 1699), he exhorted his disciples to embrace one creed and obliterate differences among all religions; "let the four Hindu castes which have different rules for their guidance be abandoned. Adopt the one form of adoration and become brothers. Let none deem himself superior to another. Let none pay heed to the Ganges and other places of pilgrimage which are spoken with reverence in the Shastras, or adore incarnations such as Rama, Krishna, Brahma and Durga, but believe in one God. Let men of the four castes receive my baptism, eat out of one dish and feel no disgust or contempt for one another". 62

In his wars against the hill Rajas, and against the imperial forces, the Guru was helped by a number of Muslim devotees, such as Sayid Buddhu Shah, who with his sons and five

hundred followers, fought against the Rajput confederacy. 
Alaf Khan, Maimum Khan and other faithful Muslims fought for 
the Guru against the Imperial forces. Ghani Khan and Nabi Khan 
helped and escorted the Guru as 'Uch-ka-Pir', when he was 
hotly pursued by the Imperial forces in the Machhiwara jungle. 
Kalha, a Chaudhri of Jagraon and Raikot entertained the Guru 
at Jatpura and helped him in inquiring from Sirhind about the 
fate of his mother and two youngest sons. Sayid Bhiken Shah, 
a Muslim saint, paid homage to the Guru at the time of his 
birth at Patna. Nawab Rahim Baksh and Nawab Karim Baksh were 
also among the Guru's admirers. This bears ample testimony to 
the fact that the Guru was held in love and esteem by the Muslims 
as well. He was not against any particular religion.63 

In the battle of Anandpur, which the Guru fought 
against the combined forces of the Rajput Rajas and the 
Imperial forces, the Sikhs complained to him that a man, called 
Bhai Kanhaiya, was distributing water indiscriminately to the 
thirsty Hindu and Muslim wounded soldiers. The Guru sent for Bhai 
Kanhaiya and asked him to explain whether the complaint against 
him was true. Bhai Kanhaiya said that he was working according 
to the instructions of the Guru and considered friend and foe as 
equal. The Guru was pleased with his reply, embraced him and 
gave him a suitable robe of honour.64 