CHAPTER 4

Existential Context of the Sikh World-View:
Society, Polity and Economy

4.1 Social Dimension: An Introduction

Society is the fundamental structure to analyze man’s position in the cultural and political context. As an individual, man can’t fulfill his needs, of whatever type, because of his limitations and he can’t achieve what he wants for his requirements, he depends on other fellow beings in society. Society thus assures man’s security. Society is not a modern phenomenon but a very ancient structure of humanity; even animals do feel security in groups. It points out an innate feeling of togetherness, by which man attains his goals either temporal or spiritual. Needs of man bring him close to others. In this process, he not only satisfies his material needs but makes efforts to understand and respect others too. In this way social and cultural value system comes into existence. With the gradual growth of society man becomes obliged to society. He can’t break and interfere with norms to regulate human behavior. So, society is a primary step towards the development of civilization.

Formation of society is found in every part of the world though varying to one another because of geographical and ethical differences. To create harmony and to set up an order, society turns to behavioral or ethical codes. “Indeed societies are characterized by the values they embody, the individual and collective motivations they encouraged, the incentives they inspire and sanctioned, and the ideals by which belief, attitude, and behavior are established and secured.”1 Without some kind of corporate or collective organization, man’s moral, economic and political necessities remain unfulfilled. The very lack of self-sufficiency makes man to be obliged, to seek and offer help to others. Thus society and ethics are complimentary to each other, society depends upon ethics and vice-versa. One thing to be noticed that ethics, customs, rules are not result of immediate reactions and necessities but an outcome of a long development. Ethic basically derives its meaning from ideals which have been framed after a long experience of a particular group or humanity. So their idealistic nature makes them obligatory to each one. Due to
two reasons ethical norms are followed by members of society without any objection. These are:

I. Their idealistic nature.
II. Collective sanction behind them.

In this way ethics assures betterment of society in three ways.

I. Ethics promotes stability of society.
II. Controls man’s negative attitude and cravings.
III. Ensures welfare and justice to all.

On the basis of the above formulations one can say that society shapes man’s destiny and provides him exposure to realize his potential and “Religion offers prescriptions for social order, individual behavior and collective action. Thus, all religious traditions give expression to the relationship between what are acknowledged and understood to be the most compelling objectives of human life and day to day conduct.”

4.1.1 Indian Society: A Brief Survey

Observations on Indian society can be found from the times of Vedas. Varna is considered to be the basic pattern and structure of Indian society, though it evolved on a later stage. Hindu social structure is based on caste system i.e. (I) brahmins (II) kashatryas (III) vaisyas (IV) sudras. “These castes were groups within varna, the jati is functional division, along with the principal of hereditary craft, it has been the main factor in the process of social crystallization and caste separatism.” The caste system not only effected a particular group, community, tribe or religion within Hinduism but also influenced those other than Hinduism in various ways. However some traditions reacted against it but their social and cultural aspects are also infected by this system. In varna system, no general rules and regulations are followed for all but differs from category to category. So this system has no universal validity. An individual does not occupy his place according to his merits and demerits but he is put into system as per dogmas prescribed by the Hindu Scriptures and these rules are imposed on him from the very birth.

This system has been criticized by many thinkers but some scholars wrote in favor of this, explaining it in association with nature and talent of different individuals.
Some interpreted it as an endeavor to fulfill the needs of society. But mostly caste system is criticized as a disease which made Indian society weak and divided Indians into several categories and resulted in slavery of foreign rulers for a long time. Even a great part of Indian population, known as *sudras*, also were marginalized to live as a deprived section of society. Apart from other things, they were compelled to live in very dissatisfactory conditions. The caste system resulted in untouchability and degradation of social and economic setup of Indian masses.

In those critical conditions in India, some spiritual personalities, traditions and even some of the secular movements protested against it. They did their best to remove the malady. In modern time after the independence of India, constitutional provisions were made to meet effective results but failed due to conditioned psychology of the people. In the history of India, Buddha was the first to condemn caste system. Mahavira and others too rejected to get rid of it. A big blow was struck by the advent of Islam. Islamic message of brotherhood and monotheism provided a sigh of relief to the unprivileged classes of society. But cruel implementations of Islamic ideology marginalized the Hindu people on the lines as Brahmin had done with *sudras* in the past.

During the second half of 16th century, advent of Guru Nanak is very important because, he not only rejected the caste system on theoretical level, but established totally a new social order to spread the message of equality and brotherhood among the people. It has been observed that “This was also preached by earlier reformers like Chaitanya, Kabir and Ramananda. Both Buddha and Guru Nanak were practical protestants against caste system and tried to eradicate it”[^4]

All the successors of Guru Nanak condemned the varna system and made efforts to remove it from social fabric. Thus “Sikhism not only reflected the intrinsic dynamics of change in the Indian society at the ideological level but also initiated and stimulated the processes and forces of change, thus heralding the promise of a new civilization, different from the earlier Indian and the Brahmanical civilization.”[^5]

### 4.1.2 Texture of Sikh Society: Historical Background

The very concept *guru* bears the supreme authority in Sikh thought. Guru is a divinely inspired personality or a messenger of God for humanity but he also plays a significant role to create a model of society. We know that Sikhism emerged as a religion
under the leadership of Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak was not only a person but a ‘spirit’ which manifested in his successors. Therefore the Sikhs believe in ‘Ten bodies with similar Spirit.’ Even after the tenth Guru, divine hymns of the Sikh Gurus and other Indian sages included in Guru Granth Sahib are taken as the ‘word’ of God. So Guru has a central place in the speculative and social structure of society. Lives of Sikh Gurus serve as a permanent source of guidance to Sikh society of what is right and what is wrong. Sikh Gurus were not ascetics like sanyasis or yogis but lived in society facing the social and political injustice and did their best to confront it. We can find many incidents when Sikhs were facing some social problem and Guru tried to solve the issue. It is a fact that Guru Arjun put the issue of agriculture tax before the then Mughal emperor Akbar. Even Guru was revered as sacha patshah (True Ruler). Literal meaning of word ‘Guru’ is also having social implication. ‘Guru’ is described as who dispels the darkness not only in spiritual context but in social context too. He may be termed as one who has experienced light symbolizing inner wisdom and darkness symbolizing harsh social realities respectively. Establishment of Akal Takhat, encouragement to Sikhs to do business, construction of new cities, organization of Sikh Panth on the pattern of royal court and army, wars with Mughal military forces are well proven facts that make us to know the relevance of Guru in social sphere. They actively promoted the social infrastructure for communal brotherhood. They envisaged a society based upon ideals of love, liberty and equality. According to Upinderjit Kaur, “The nomination of Guru Angad signified a continuity system of Guruship, which was essential to bringing his mission to fruition. It was one of the most significant events in the evolution of Sikh faith into a dynamic society.”

Guru Amardas is especially, known for many social reforms like removal of caste system, sati and purdah system etc. To harmonize all Sikh followers scattered in and around Punjab, he devised manji system. We can see that Sikh Gurus were not constructing only a religious tradition but also laying firm foundations for the growth of the Sikh society. Here Guru should not be termed merely a political leader as sometime misconceived by modern historians. “Guru Arjan paved the way for a guruship of considerable temporal significance and his son Hargobind and grandson Gobind Singh
made the concept a reality. Nevertheless sight was not lost of the primary concern for providing spiritual enlightenment…”

The ideal man (gurmukh) in Sikhism is a jivan mukta who remains detached amidst the worldly allurements as lotus remains in water. So, while living in the world he engages himself in the service of society. So jivan mukta is the “state of experiential transcendence.” True ascetic is he who experiences the Ultimate Truth but still remains engaged in his worldly life in a very detached way. So, integration of spiritual and temporal aspects is the basic quality of Sikh society. Sikhism cultivated the idea of existential reality as ‘true’ that is an integral part of institutional character of Sikh religion. The society, Guru Nanak envisioned, was essentially pluralistic in nature. Sikhism accepts that sages, saints and seers have experienced and expressed ‘The Divine’ in different ways from different angles. Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia considers it an ontological basis of pluralistic conception of Sikh society. He writes, “The approaches to reality, doors of perceptions of the Divine, are as varied and infinite as God’s qualities themselves are. The metaphysical postulate of the plurality of approaches to reality is the basis of Guru Nanak’s vision of pluralistic society and civilization…” Guru Teg Bahadur sacrificed his life for the cause of ‘other’ to maintain religious and political pluralism and symbolizing a lesson that is more relevant in modern times. “Sikhism is concerned with fundamental right to religious freedom, coexistence and tolerance not only as an abstract right on the individual level but also as concrete right on corporate, social level”

In Medieval India, stress was laid upon the concept of reality that the world of time and space is unreal, only brahman, the ultimate reality is real. That’s why world was considered as mithya. Consequently, individual emancipation was emphasized. According to that, man’s real concerns were not this worldly but other worldly. It increased a dichotomy between sacred and profane.

In the Sikh thought Society’s existential concerns are equated with spiritual ones. Here God partakes in the world. This notion, thus, totally changed the very perspective of values. Such are the imperatives of Sikh social structure. All are coequal partners in the common wealth, with none as excluded and alien.

4.1.3 Doctrinal Basis of Sikh Society
As already mentioned, Sikh thought does not consider/accept any type of distinction within mankind. Its founder prophet, Guru Nanak did not tolerate the division of human race rather stressed upon the unity of mankind.\textsuperscript{14} In Guru Granth Sahib, while emphasizing equality, God has been regarded as a father and mankind have been equated as his progeny. God being Universal Spirit pervades in all human beings. The self of every man is a part of the universal Supreme Spirit and all are the image of one God. The whole universe is his creation, every man can attain union with the God despite the fact that he may belong to any caste, culture or background. While writing about Guru Nanak’s applied ethics of casteless society, Jodh Singh writes that, “Guru Nanak’s voice was not a voice from without for society. Unmindful of the fact that he himself belonged to a higher caste (\textit{khatri}), he chose from the very beginning of his life, his lifelong companion Mardana who not only belonged to a lower caste (\textit{mirasi}) but was also a Muslim.”\textsuperscript{15} So Sikhism does not recognize caste based superiority or inferiority. During his missionary tours, Guru Nanak went to Syadpur and stayed in the house of a low caste carpenter, Bhai Lalo. When Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa in the year of 1699, all five beloved ones who offered their life to Guru and were blessed by Guru Gobind Singh as \textit{panj pyare}, in fact belonged to different low castes. At that time Guru Gobind Singh enjoined upon the Sikhs that they should only embrace one creed of God and by abandoning caste system should treat each other like brothers and sisters. Thus, equality has a very important role in the social order as proposed by the Sikh Gurus. For them, man is just a \textit{jiva}, sent by God on earth to earn goodness through devotion to God and service to humanity. Sikhism constitutes a universalism and refuses to accept the \textit{varna} and caste as a social ethics. Pluralism at any level either social or biological has been recognized as a beauty of world. Homogeneous attitude is totally rejected here. Holistic nature of society as promoted by the Sikh Gurus is based on love, service, sympathy etc. “The ideal society envisaged in Adi Granth is not Utopia but a reality, it demolishes all the walls and prejudices between man and women…It breaks away the shackles of formalism, it gives freedom about food, shelter and clothing. This brotherhood is free from any distinction of caste.”\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{4.1.3.1 Household Life}
In Indian systems, there were yogis, sanyasis and brahamcharis who were not active participants in social life. Though they contributed in their own way, yet preferred a life of solitude, a life beyond human society. Their religious experience and insights, of course, were beneficial for humankind, but their non-acceptance of social responsibilities caused a great suffering inflicted on Indian society. It must be remembered that they were going away from society not for self-enjoyment but to realize a supreme cause higher than material life. So they have some positive sides too. Instead of sharing the social responsibilities of their own and helping their fellow beings, because of wise and enlightened than the others, they preferred to desert the society. It was a very irresponsible act by abandoning the social dynamics; they left for forests and mountains. The question arises that who will guide, lead and protect the society? Sikh Gurus were conscious about the phenomena happening around them. They propagated the idea of household life. They inspired their followers to get married and perform their duties towards society so that degradation of moral values may be removed from the society. In this way, Sikh Gurus emphasized the institutions of family and marriage to prevent the tendency of asceticism. Guru Nanak’s dialogue in Siddha Gosti is very important to understand the contemporary Indian society. In this composition, Guru Nanak advocates detached way of life while living in the world whereas yogis, having abandoned their homes, were living in forests, just by eating roots and fruits.  

The objective of man’s life, realization of God, can only be attained by not forsaking the world, but actively participating in societal affairs. It is a very natural way of life in which a lay man satisfies his needs either physical or psychological. He gets exposure to channelize his inner potential and capacities; because of this, Sikh Gurus rejected the path of holy mendicancy and assigned a prime place to the life of a householder. Here family relations and social responsibilities are not considered to be bondage but essential elements to achieve spiritual goals. Sikhism prescribes renunciation of attitude of worldly attachments not that of the world. Upinderjit Kaur rightly says that “Sikhism advocates this-worldly asceticism. Man has to be ascetic within and secular without.” It is also important to know that practice of asceticism has speculative base in the dichotomy of sacred and profane, matter and soul. According to the notion, as found in the spiritual traditions of India, all physical phenomena are perishable due to their
transitory and mundane nature. It is a fact that nothing in physical form can survive for a long life. At a particular point of time objects or things made of matter are destined to decay. Transition or death is instinctive nature of matter. It cannot persist in every phase of time. Thus time and space influence the physical existence, may it be of whatever type. Lord Buddha’s teachings are very relevant to understand this. Middle way, as shown by him, is that nothing exists or nothing extincts but changes its mode of appearance that is the everlasting process of universe. On the other hand, scriptures of India assert that only one thing is eternal that is brahman. Only brahman is a substantial element from which cosmos emerged and God has the capacity to absorb in Himself or destroy it within moments. Thus social life is associated with the phenomenon of the short span of life. If God is ultimate and eternal, then why should we not devote our whole life to have a relation with supra mundane reality. In spite of balancing these two ends of human life, Indian sages and saints chose the way of world renunciation and became mendicants.

In Sikhism, asceticism has been rejected in theory and practice but a man occupies a creative role by doing service of humanity. “Sikh Gurus did not accept any dichotomy of matter and soul. They did not lower the status of material nature, human body and worldly pursuits in comparison to the concerns of the spirit.” The Sikh Gurus taught that an enlightened person should not retire to forests and mountains but should indulge himself wholeheartedly for the upliftment of society. Even lives of the Sikh Gurus bear a testimony to the above mentioned statement. They emphasized that true yogi’s living is possible at home in this world and he need not go to forests to attain yogic ideals.

They hold that true yogi restrains his mind living as a householder. Devotion to God, earn one’s own livelihood and sharing with well off, are the cardinal principles of Sikhism. Every Sikh is required to follow these principles to elevate the social and spiritual status of society. It is the family that teaches one to act as a responsible individual. To earn with sincerity, imparts social and economic progress to society. Household life gives us a domestic atmosphere where mother, father, sister, brother, wife, children and other relations foster one’s psychological needs. The values of love and compassion can germinate only in family life, so family happens to be the basic unit of society. Our creativity can fully flourish only in worldly life.
Other notable aspect of householder’s life, in social context, is that the Sikh Gurus placed high value on chastity in sexual life. Adultery is regarded as a sin in Sikhism, because marriage is considered not only an institution in which a person satisfies his instinctive physiological needs but helps to secure the growth and development of society. So to satisfy one’s own sexual needs, through marriage, is not a snare of evil but these should be fulfilled in a proper and lawful way. It is not any hurdle in the spiritual ascent of man. Marriage is an instrumental institution to balance the society in proper way. Even in Sikh conception regarding the ultimate reality, God has been described as a husband.21

Life is to be lived in its fullness; it is not something to be thrown away. Woman too is held in high esteem since marriage holds the valuable place in Sikhism. Marriage is a very practical and natural phenomenon for taming the biological instincts of man. However compelled or self-imposed celibacy may result in very dangerous problems for society. These instinctive biological needs must be regulated in a pure way of living, otherwise these impulses can disturb the social life with negative consequences. The Sikh Gurus regarded this type of household life a true asceticism that contributes to cultivate social values. As said above, life full of sensuous pleasures has been also rejected by the Sikh Gurus.22 They were not in favor of wholly indulgence in material comforts. Here self restraints play a crucial role. In Sikhism marriage is a fusion of two souls into one.23 So the Sikh Gurus paved a way that was altogether different from those of the others. Approach of Sikh Gurus towards life and their methodology to accomplish it, is very distinctive in Indian context that established a novel world-view.

For them religion was not only a set of beliefs and practices (rituals) but they preached a genuine life inspired by service and sacrifice. They strictly denounced renunciation, and asked their disciples to work hard that enables man to lead an altruistic life in the world. For a Sikh, to engage oneself in worldly responsibilities is liken to improve the quality of human life on the planet which is a creation of God. “One outstanding feature of Guru Nanak’s teachings is its spirit of affirmation. He proclaimed the world to be creation of God, projecting the Divine Being and Divine purpose. He placed a positive value on the natural order and thus brought the worldly structure - the
family and the political, social and economic structures within the spheres of religious activity.”

In Guru Granth Sahib we see that yogis and sanyasis have been strongly criticized for retreat from world and taking shelters in mountain caves. According to the teachings of Sikh Gurus, it is a highly individualistic attitude leaving lay men in wilderness of ignorance. In fact withdrawal from world is negation of spirituality. Man should not shirk from his duties but must accept challenges and frustrations of life boldly. Monastic and detached life cut off a person from mainstream human race. Such a selfish person cannot contribute to society. That is why Guru Nanak chided siddhas for not fulfilling their assigned mission in the world.” For him the truly religious person does not retreat from the world but “battles in open field, with his mind perfectly in control and with his heart poised in love all the time.”

We find in Gurbani that house holder is regarded far superior to recluse since he restrains his passions, works for his living, and dispenses charity to other. According to Guru Nanak, “He alone is a householder who disciplines his senses and desires. And begs from God contemplation, austerity, self-control and gives in charity all that he can, through his body. Such a householder is pure, like the ganga’s water”

4.1.3.2 Gender Equality

In the construction of Sikh society women have a very significant place in equality to men. In Sikh society, ‘she’ has contributed in cultural, social and historical development. It is a well known fact that according to Gurbani whole humankind is regarded as woman whose husband is only God. In Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Guru describes themselves repeatedly as wives of God. Every Sikh Guru was married except Guru Harkrishan who died just at the age of eight and their wives set an example of ideal woman. We also find that during Vedic period, women had enjoyed a very respectful status. Among sages of Vedas, women are also there but in later development of Hinduism, they were given a secondary place in religious life and institutions. With the passage of time, as the idea of world renunciation got currency, woman became a hurdle in spiritual growth and was considered a way that leads to hell. So as the concept of sanyasa and brahmacharya became popular practices of the time, status of woman was degraded more and more. Thus woman, in their view, became the source of lust and
greed. Yogi and sanyasis preferred to renounce the married life considering it as a problem for salvation. They took vow to remain celibate forever. The founder of Buddhism, Lord Buddha also adopted the life of seclusion by renouncing his wife, son and state. So Buddhist monks are required by their religious discipline to remain celibate. Jainism too debarred woman from making their proper contribution to social advancement. The digambara sect of Jainism maintains that woman can’t obtain moksha. She cannot become siddhas and if wants to enter into heaven or attaining moksha, she will have to take rebirth as a man. In this way she will get emancipation from the cycle of birth and death. Obviously she was deprived of religious rights. We see that religious factors concerned with woman are also important to outline the social pattern of any society.

“According to Manusmriti only man but of upper castes are entitled for religious education. Woman and shudras both are debarred from any kind of religious education or religious experience.”31 The condition of woman was no better than that of downtrodden sudra, equal to the status of a slave. It is true that during Vedic period women enjoyed respectful status in society, even no religious or social work was considered to be complete without woman. No differentiation was made between boys and girls. According to S. Radhakrishnan, in the Vedic period, “Seclusion of woman was unknown. Young girls led free lives, and had a share in the property of the father, and they were sometimes allowed to remain unmarried with their parents and brothers”32 The prevalence of evil of child marriage was a historical reality. In the case of husband’s death a women could not marry as a widow. So birth of a female child was a sign of misfortune and that of a son was most desired thing, gradually female infanticide came to be practiced. She had no right to live after the death of her husband. The custom of sati became fashion of the time.

There were the social reformers of 19th century who raised their voice in the favor of woman and advocated rights of women. After Indian independence, the constitutional provisions were made to guarantee the social rights of woman.

4.1.3.3 Role and Status of Women in Sikh Society

The Sikhism is very different from Hinduism on the issue of woman. Sikh Gurus had laid down the foundation of a progressive social order. They advocated the principle
of universal equality and brotherhood. In Sikhism a woman is held equal to man in every way. No restrictions are imposed regarding participation in social life. There is no need of veil woman wearing in public places as in Hinduism. Guru Angad Dev assigned the duties regarding langar to his wife, Mata Khivi. Guru Amardas appointed them as supervisors to community jobs and office of missionary work. Mata Jito, the wife of Guru Gobind Singh, appeared at the time of creation of Khalsa and put sugar crystals into amrit. In Sikh history, we see that women have equal rights in the social and political fields too, Mai Bhago. Maharani Jind Kaur participated in politics too. The Sikh history records the heroic role performed by Sikh women during the dark period of Sikh History after the death of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. It was not a transformation or a revolution but metamorphosis brought about by the teachings of Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, raised his voice for justice to women. When Guru Nanak was on long missionary tours, his wife Mata Sulakhani handled the domestic responsibilities and thus set an example of ideal woman. Guru Nanak shows a great respect for women. He questions the denigration of the very sex and said:

From the woman is our birth, we are shaped in the woman’s womb.
We are engaged and wedded to the woman. The woman is our beloved and we have family from woman. If one woman dies, we seek another, then why we call woman evil that gives birth to kings. Without the woman there is none, O Nanak, without the woman one true Lord is alone.  \(^{33}\)

Sikhism insists that woman is the basis of man’s physical existence and his entire social life, so she must be treated with respect and love. To establish such a reputed position of women in society, the Sikh Gurus denounced all those practices and rituals which had reduced the status of woman. As mentioned above that practice of sati was very common in medieval India. The Sikh Gurus, particularly Guru Amardas started a vigorous campaign to abolish it. He wrote that:

A sati is not who burns herself on the pyre of her spouse. Nanak, a sati is really who suffers from the deathly separation. The sati is one who lives contended and embellishes herself with God and cherishes her Lord ever and calls on him each moment. Such women bury themselves
on the pyres of their lords. But if they love their spouses well, they suffer
the pangs of separation even otherwise.\textsuperscript{34}

Sikhism does not aspire for spiritual growth at the cost of suppression of human
instincts. It stands for gratification of bodily desires in a restrained manner. Marriage is a
social institution where these biological instincts are regulated in a proper way. In spite of
suppression of these needs, man should practice self restraints. A Sikh is ordained to be
an ascetic within the secular mode of life. He should lead his life as lotus in muddy water.
So woman is an embodiment of virtue not an evil. Existence of man and woman is
complimentary to each other. Both of them work in partnership to gain the four
objectives: \textit{dharma, artha, kama} and \textit{moksa}. Both of them should be loyal to each other.
Sikhism redefined the celibacy in the terms of secular and sacred, a blended mode of
social life.

According to Bhai Gurdas, who did not get married, celibate is one who is
married to one woman and regards other women as their sisters and daughters.\textsuperscript{35} In
concluding words we can say that feminism in Europe started in the eighteenth century
but Sikhism raised its voice in favor of woman during sixteenth century. Upinderjit Kaur
writes that, “The concept of equality of women with man not only gave woman an
identity of her own, but freed from all kinds of fetters to which she bound in the Hindu
Society.”\textsuperscript{36} We find that social vision of Sikhism is a balanced mixture of thought and
action. Sikh Gurus conceived the society of \textit{gurmukhs} who serve humanity and fight for
humanity along with his spiritual upliftment. “Men and women enjoyed equal status
according to him (Guru Nanak) and in breaking of caste barriers he revolutionized Indian
social and religious thought.”\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{4.1.4 Institutional Foundations of Sikh Society}

\textbf{4.1.4.1 Sangat}

Sikhism stressed upon the congregational nature of spirituality from the very
beginning. \textit{Sangat} is another important concept and institution of Sikhism. It is a holy
assemblage of Sikhs gathered around the Guru Granth Sahib while singing hymns in the
praise of God. It is an archetypal form of Sikh society from which it derives inspiration
and pragmatic meanings.
Bhai Gurdas while discussing the nature of *sangat*\(^{38}\) writes that *sangat* is highly revered for God and the Guru have their abode in it. He reiterates that Guru is present in the *sangat* which signifies *sachkhand* where God is worshiped. So at first step, there was Guru who experienced the Divine. Secondly, he made known the Will of God in the form of Gurbani, that is *sabda*. Thirdly, the *sangat* receives the very revelatory message, and the fourth is *dharamsal* where congregation meets in unity and spiritual celebrations are performed.

These *sangats* or *dharmasals* became the central place of spiritual and temporal activities of the Sikh Panth. *Manji* system, established by Guru Amardas, was an important step to organize an independent social system. Though *dharamsal* is primarily concerned and used for spiritual purposes yet social activities are not prohibited there. The methodology of functioning in *sangats* can be very useful to construct an ideal Sikh society. Tendency of dialogue, no gender discrimination, freedom to express one’s own views, equality are basic tenets to understand the role of *sangat* in the Sikh society. Teja Singh describes the social reasons for establishing *sangats*. He writes “It may not be necessary in the case of an individualistic religion, wherein the highest aim is to empty the mind of all its desires, or to dream away the whole life in jungles or mountains; but where religion consist in realizing God mainly through service done within the world, where men have constantly to deal with men to promote each other’s Good, it is impossible to do without organization.”\(^{39}\)

4.1.4.2 Langar: Framing a Pattern for Social Equality

After *sangat*, *pangat* was another archetype which provided basis for the development of Sikh society. Generally, it is translated as ‘free kitchen’ or ‘community kitchen’. In Sikh terminology it is also known as *pangat* literally means ‘a line of devotees sitting together on the same floor’. In *langar* no seat is reserved for anybody. During Guru period it was compulsory for Sikhs and non-Sikh devotees rich or poor, king or pauper to have meal from *langar* before meeting the Guru. All the needs of kitchen were met by the voluntarily offerings made by the Sikhs to Guru. It played a very effective role to remove the restrictions based on caste and social status. It was a very significant institution that was established by the Sikh Gurus in the very beginning of Sikhism. It was not only to help needy persons or provide food for hungry men and
women but throughout the history it played a vital role in the development of Panth. It influenced the Sikh way of life in social context too. Though similar attitude may be seen in Sufi khangahs and in Indian context “Langar was already there among yogis.”

Before Guru Nanak, nothing existed on the patterns of langar. It is also interesting to know that during 16th century, Indian bhagatas, contemporaries of Guru Nanak, were also preaching brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God but the practice of langar was also unknown to them. Ramananda and Ramanuja also raised their voice against caste system but only at spiritual level. Dr. Jodh Singh rightly says that, “At this point it may be argued that Ramanuja and Ramananda also belonged to higher castes and yet they stressed upon the equality of man. True that on a spiritual and philosophical level these revered saints preached the equality of man but Guru Nanak did not stop merely at that. He went on to practice that equality in the social life both in the spiritual context as well as in day to day actions.”

Sikh Gurus denounced the spirituality that was unable to produce positive societal results and a true spirituality must create feelings of respect and honor for fellow beings. So they promoted the institution of langar to achieve the objective of an ideal society.

As mentioned above that in Indian context yogis do have langar system but hierarchy still existed there. Sikh Gurus abolished all these barriers and even shared food with other Sikh devotees while sitting on the same floor. The creation of the Khalsa was climax in the series of establishing an ideal society in which persons belonging to different castes were taken into the fold from Indian masses that by breaking every type of barrier either social or regional. This incident is sometime interpreted as a revolution and a novel experiment. “Guru Nanak not only raised his voice against social injustice, he successfully demonstrated now his principle of equality could be implemented. He tried his utmost to make the society a healthy gathering of Gurmukhs who are expected to be full of love for fellow beings and without ego.”

We observe that sangat and pangat were the institutions where spiritual and social intermingled in such a way that it produced a fine blend of bhakti and shakti. We can imagine that how they played an important role with far reaching consequences. Analysis of pangat is also valuable in economic dimension that will be discussed later on.
So the congregation, as a fundamental unit of Sikh society, comprises all sections of society and was led by leaders authorized by the Gurus. Gradually it became considerably powerful and gained a more important spiritual status. So much so that Guru Gobind Singh transferred the spiritual authority to Guru Granth and social-political authority to *sangat* or *panth*. “All the problems involving the interest and welfare of the community were referred to *Sangats*.”

It must be noted that till 18th century the Sikh society besides the main stream comprised the dissenters as well. There were *Minas, Ramraiyas, Dhirmalyia, Masands, Handalis* who were considered to be dissenters. Except this there were also two major groups which formed the inner core of Sikh society. According to Max Arthur Macauliffe the Sikhs were divided into *sahajdharis* and *singhs*. Khalsa or Singh were baptized group of warriors who preferred militant life, on the other hand *sahajdharis* were not baptized. Sikhs ceremonially, but believers and devotees of the Sikh Gurus. They were also practicing teaching enunciated by the Sikh Gurus and participating and supporting programs of Khalsa yet living a non-militant life.

In the Sikh society, there were also some sects which remained continuously in touch with main stream of Sikhs. Except some minor difference of code of conduct, they formed a part of the Sikh Panth. Except the order of the Khalsa which held a dominant position in the Sikh society, other sections of the Sikhs earned their livelihood by agriculture or trade. *Udasis, Nirmalas, Seva Panthis*, and *Nihangs* can be included as major denominations of the Panth. During the *misl* period, though the Sikh society was divided into twelve groups even fought against each other yet they never gave up the belief in the Sikh Gurus and Guru Granth Sahib. All these groups gathered twice a year at Amritsar where past successes and failures were discussed and future plans were recommended. They abide by the *gurmattas* (resolutions) sanctioned by *sarbat khalsa*. Though Sikh Gurus unequivocally rejected the caste system but it is a matter of pity that the evil of caste system does prevail in modern Sikh society.

4.1.4.3 Gurdwara

Gurdwara is another institution of Sikhism since its beginning. Though primarily it was a place for spiritual activities of Sikh masses but social needs became integral part of Gurdwara during the later development of Sikhism. Initially it was known as
dharamsal that was primarily used for spiritual purposes. With the passage of time, it became a center of corporate life of the community. “The social anchor of life among Sikhs is provided by the gurdawara where congregations are held. Gurdwaras are the nucleus of the life of Sikhs, the whole community life revolves around them. The Sikhs draw inspiration from them and have unflinching faith in congregations.” A Sikh lives not as an individual but in a group or community, so he is asked to join congregational prayer with other fellow beings. Feelings of togetherness with other fellow disciples of Guru result in values of unity, equality and humility. In this way, Gurdwara is an abode of sangat, where a Sikh participates in religious exercises in accordance with the collective will of sangat.

In Indian context we find, temples were not a characteristic of early Hinduism because yajna was performed in open space. So during the Vedic period, such type of exclusive worship of a deity was not possible in a temple due to its polytheistic nature besides several cults came into existence. They formed their own sacred places for their own gods and specialized persons, called priests, were appointed to perform cultic job and to take care of these places. As temples grew more and more, the worship process also became complicated as particular type of rituals were required. Sculpture, painting, dance, drama, music, literature etc. were closely connected with temples. Exploits and glories of concerned god/goddess were depicted/described in several manners. “In fact temples came to play most important religious, cultural and artistic role in medieval India.”

4.1.4.4 Way of Worship

Unlike Hinduism the Sikh Gurudwara does not allow idol worship. In Hindu temples idols are central objects and are worshiped with passion but there is no place for idol worship in the Sikh Gurdwaras. The central object of worship in the Gurdwara is Guru Granth Sahib which is considered as supreme manifestation of sabda. No ritual like arti is performed in Gurdwaras with the exceptions, but it is not recommended by common code of conduct approved by the Sikhs. In itself Guru Granth Sahib is not an object but regarded as an embodiment of sabda, the divine revelation as descended upon Guru Nanak and his successors.
To analyze the social impact of Gurdwara on the Sikhs, we should look upon the Gurdwara more than a place of worship. In modern Indian History, the Gurdwara reform movement awakened the Sikhs to achieve the right to manage their shrines from which they were deprived. So Gurdwara is a centre of political and social inspiration too. Pritam Singh writes that, “Sitting in the sangat along with all co-disciples develops a sense of humility, sympathy, love, equality and brotherhood. It is a means of developing corporate life. So a Sikh is not an individualist. He has more social and national sense than the people of other communities. This social anchor of life among Sikhs is provided by Gurdwara.” With the passage of time, Gurdwara gained more socio-political importance. After the creation of the Khalsa, the collective body of the Sikhs, sangat was converted into Khalsa Panth. So Gurdwara was a place where Panth used to deliberate upon the issues regarding the community. So decisions made in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib are abided by all the Sikhs throughout the world. In this way, Gurdwaras played host to crystallize the idea of collective will that paved the way for struggle for political rights too.

Guru Gobind Singh conferred sovereignty upon the Panth not on any individual. Though Sikh thought also accepts individual entity but it is not self-centered individualism. Gurdwara inspires Sikhs socially as well as politically. That is why the British rulers tried to sabotage the Sikh Gurdwara Reform Movement. Happenings in Nankana Sahib, Jaito, Guru Ka Bagh, indicate that ultimately the Britishers had to yield before the Sikh community. “The Sikhs and Gurdwaras are welded to each other, they will always go together, Gurdwaras produce Sikhs and Sikhs produce Gurdwara. Gurdwaras are the memory of their Guru whom they can never forget.”

The Singh Sabha movement, the Sikh renaissance which began towards the closing decades of 19th century also helped to highlight Gurdwara as a driving force of Sikh society and freed the Gurdwaras from the clutches of corrupt mahants. It created awakening among the Sikhs regarding social affairs of their community. So, active role of these organizations resulted in formation of so many social and political bodies. Chief Khalsa Diwan was an educational body, on the other hand Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee deals with religious issues of the Sikhs and management of historical Gurdwaras. The origin of Shiromani Akali Dal, the main political body of the
Sikhs, was also a result of this movement. A large network of socio-political institutions is contributing richly to common cause of humanity. As mentioned above, Gurdawara is not only a worship place but some activities of it are concerned with secular life too. Gurdwara has some institutions associated with it such as langar, sarovar (bathing pool), inn which are run voluntarily and free of cost. These services are not exclusively for a particular group among the Sikhs, anybody who follows the Sikh code of conduct can administer duties or can participate without any distinction of caste, color or creed. “All sit on same floor and nobody is treated as special. Women are given full respect and equal rights. The devotees go a long way in improving social relations and imparting a feeling of social equality.”

Harmandir Sahib, known as symbol of heavenly abode and an archetype of sachkhand, has doors on all the four directions, signifying that everybody can enter into house of God from any caste of four varnas. “Apart from being their places of worship they stand for love, peace and brotherhood of mankind. Social equality, universal brotherhood, altruism and social service constitute the main principles of communities’ social ethics.” To Sum up, Gurdwara stands for the total orientation of life of the individual and Sikh society for a creative and meaningful existence.

4.1.5 Khalsa Code of Conduct and its Social Context

The Khalsa code of conduct especially the concept of five K’s has been of immense importance to Sikh history and theology, and it has been interpreted from various outlooks particularly from spiritual stand points. But J.P.S Uberoi, a sociologist, has stressed upon the social significance of Five K’s. He considers these symbols a departure from Indian tradition. He wrote that “In contradiction to the Jogi, Sanyasi ritual of nakedness or smearing with ashes, the Sikh neophyte is made to come tidily clothed to the ceremony. The ear-rings effected by Jogis are specifically forbidden to him (Sikh). Instead of requiring the Sanyasis resolve, ‘I am no one’s, and no one is mine…Even more significantly, perhaps, the initiator, instead of being the individual Guru, is a collective group, the five beloved ones, composed of any five good Sikhs. Instead of gurumantra being communicated secretly to the neophyte, as with Sanyasis, Jogis and Dadupanthis, the Sikh Guru’s word is spoken loud and clear by imitators. Finally, in opposition to the Jogi vow never to touch weapons, the Sikh neophyte is invested ritually with the kirpan...
(sword) as one of five K’s which he must always bear thereafter.”  

He further elaborates that, “the Sikh initiation rite contains a marked theme of inversion in relation to rites of social renunciation established by medieval mendicant orders that preceded Sikhism. Like them, Sikhism was instated as a religious brotherhood open to all but its spiritual and social aims were indirect contrast to what theirs had been. Whereas they had sought to obtain emancipation at the price, as their rites signify, of social death, the Sikh community was to affirm the normal social world as itself the battleground of freedom. The meaning of being unshorn, in particular is thus constituted by the ‘negation of the negation’, it signifies the permanent renunciation of renunciation.”

Sikhism thus, according to Dr. Uberoi, recognizes powers of three spheres of rajaya, sanyas, and grihsatha, and tends to cultivate these virtues in individual. He underlines the social implications of Sikh initiation rite and writes “the characteristics, rights and responsibilities of the three spheres as equally valid and to invest them as an undivided unit in the neophyte. The new Sikh, therefore, takes no Jogi vow to renounce the procreative power and marry; instead he dons the Kachh of continence. Instead of vowing like the Jogi never to touch weapon, or take other employment or engage in trade, every occupation is henceforth open to him including that of soldiering household ship, or political command…the five symbols of Sikhism may be said to signify, in their respective pairs, the virtues of Sanyas Yoga (Kes and Kanga), Grihsatha Yoga (Kachh and Uncircumcised state) and Raja Yoga (Kirpan and Kara).” Thus social thought as presented by Sikhism paves the way for balanced and integrated view of life. Niharranjan Ray, a distinguished social thinker, reiterates the above view “the Sikh concerns for achieving a harmonized balance between negation and acceptance, between unleashing of power and restraining of power and between indulgence and abstinence.”

It is an integrated view towards life which characterizes the social feature of Sikhism and Sikh society. The most significant contribution of Sikhism is the effective integration of temporal and spiritual pursuits of life.

4.2 Political Dimension: Significance and Indian Perspective

To outline or analyze any political system, first of all we should study the prevalent institutions and their functioning within a particular polity. Sometimes new institutions are borrowed due to local needs, and even some of them are inherited from
preceding generations or they may be newly generated. But the fundamental requirement is that they must be in tune with the requirements of the community. “A new institution imported from outside will not flourish if the proper roots are not there. As some imported seeds do not grow if the soil is of different type than the one from where the seeds have been brought.” Some institutions are transplanted from outside but they do not work properly. Because nature or culture of a particular group or country does not match it and they may not be prepared to change their nature and habits which are a product of centuries. For example, Parliamentary system has been borrowed from England and till date it has become a universal polity. European and other countries have adopted it but what success has been achieved by England, no other country in the world has achieved.

Religious institutions are part and parcel of Indian tradition. “The idea of sammati or a folk assembly is outlined in the Rig Veda. A common assembly of all the people was held for a prayer or for making a general policy. In the Atharva Veda there is a reference to the continuity of this tradition.” During the times of Guru Nanak, we find that Mughal invasions on India were looming large. There was no serious attempt to thwart the Mughal coming into India. But on the other hand Guru Nanak and his successors taught people to resist those who wanted to impose their own religion on the others. Punjab was a gateway to India. Whenever any attack was made by the invaders across Hindukush, people of Punjab were first to face it. So they had developed a temperament to go through such problems. This political anarchy in a way helped them to be physically robust and mentally strong. They did not submit to any pressure and unjust rule. They would not recognize anybody superior to them except their Guru and God. Their armed confrontation with the Mughal Emperor at that time had inculcated a spirit to resist the evil forces. In the context of polity, whosoever invaded India, also brought with him a new polity. The Turks, Mughals, Afghans etc. imposed their own forms of political set up that was not suitable sometimes to the local conditions.

According to traditional Indian thought, King was authorized by God to rule over masses. It was his right to be a king on the earth. He was not answerable to anybody for his acts but exception was that he must be anointed by the priest and was obliged to obey the instructions of priestly class. So Brahmin was next to the King. He held a very
respectable and high status in the Indian polity and society. Manu had asked the king to preserve caste system. Brahmin was on the top in caste based divisions provided by Manu. King was helpless to do anything without the help of Brahmin. To follow the advice and instructions of Brahmin, pertaining to every type of matters, was compulsory for the king. Next was khatri a soldiering class, but, according to Guru Nanak they were not following profession prescribed by their dharma. King was the despot and there was no element of democratic setup in this polity.

Though for the help of king in practical affairs, a council of ministers was there but it could not act independently. Though king had freedom to take decision but there was a slight check imposed by the priestly class, the custodian of dharma. King had no right to change the rights and social status of any caste. Interpreter of law was the Brahmin who controlled the State. Socially there was a gap among different sections of Indian society. “The whole society was stratified into a number of high and low levels of social status who had no community of anything. In such inequalities prevailing in the society, the democratic spirit can never develop.” These worst circumstances resulted in the political stagnation of the country. This was the situation before the Sikh Gurus and they responded to it in a very original manner in their hymns.

4.2.1 Religion, State and Modern Democracy

During the medieval age, we see that state was not an absolute authority, but its powers were also shared by religious and feudal classes. With the beginning of modern age democratic system came into existence. It overturned the feudal and religious dependence and adopted the secular form. In this way control or interference by other powers into state affairs disappeared and with the passage of time democracy got a universal identity for a successful polity. It is necessary to observe the truth that although democracy is defined as “a government in which supreme power is exercised by the people directly or indirectly through a system of representation.” but all powers of political set up are here too centered on the state. State is more powerful than people. State is often criticized for oppression on minorities and other types of dissent. Though democratic set up is also useful in many aspects but it has proved to be a beautiful sword that would behead the individuals in the name of national integration or peace or law and order. What we want to say is that it is not free from imperfections which are very
harmful to the very spirit of state. So there was also a strong reaction against the absolute authority of state in democracy. As a result, Postmodern thought emerged out of this reaction and it stressed multi-cultural, multi-focal and pluralistic nature of state. This recognizes the identity of every group, society, race and individual as parallel to others.\(^{60}\)

In this way legal supremacy of state came under the scrutiny of morality and ethics. Postmodern thought accepts the importance of minor cultures, tribes, sects, religious communities etc. Under such a political system religious community has right to demand autonomy. So in modern age, political thought again faces similar problem as it did in the medieval times. Thus state has lost its absolute control over the religious communities.

### 4.2.2 Attitude of the Sikh Gurus towards State

Students of history are familiar with the fact about the monarchical nature of state in the absolute sense. Religion was a helper, but not in its true meaning and context as it was also hijacked by hypocrites and was being practiced to have a control over people, and to exploit them.

In the times of Guru Nanak, Ibrahim Lodhi was the ruler of Delhi. Though Guru Nanak himself was working as a government employee how could his prophetic spirit tolerate the cruelty of rulers, so he spoke against the tyranny. He comments that “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 lick up all the blood that they spill but, men will be judged at the Lord’s court. Their noses will be chopped off, for God will not trust them.”\(^{61}\) In Guru Nanak’s vision, it is the duty of enlightened persons to put the state on its right course whenever it deviates from its duties. He does not adopt the way of passive religiosity but actively favors the rights of people. He openly condemns the state for its misdeeds. This attitude was totally against the attitude of escapism of Indian yogis and sanyasis. He mourns over the loss of ennobling spirit of religion and polity. He was worried that there was no trace of a ray of hope. He writes that “The Kaliyuga is a knife, the kings are butchers and righteousness has taken to wings; it is dark night of falsehood; and moon of truth has disappeared. The vain search has made me mad; and I am unable to locate the path. Masses are suffering with pain but due to ego. Nanak say; will world escape its tragedy?”\(^{62}\) He was not only evoking the dogmatic criticism of state but in practice too, he criticized the foreign invaders like
Babur. He did not tolerate the invasion and carnage committed by Babur over Indian masses.

After Guru Nanak, his successors continued his mission. Guru Amardas divided his spiritual kingdom into 22 dioceses known as *manji* system. A devoted Sikh was appointed in charge of each, whose main task was to preach Sikhism and to submit the offerings made by the Sikhs to the Guru. Later on these devoted Sikhs were called *masands*. It was the duty of every Sikh to save tenth of his earning for the Guru that was called *daswandh*. These funds were used to finance public welfare projects or to help the needy persons. Though it seems to be totally voluntary yet its other implications also came into light with the gradual growth of Sikhism. First and foremost job of these *masands* were to preach Sikhism throughout India but establishment of this system helped the Sikhs to organize themselves into a well knit society.

When Guru Arjun was martyred by the orders of Jahagir, the Sikhs were compelled to think about their safety. Guru Hargobind, the Sixth Guru asked his followers to bear arms and himself adopted the style of a soldier. The very decision of the Guru, though, was taken from the defensive view point yet it was over laden with political overtones. In this way Sikh Gurus legitimized the use of arms against any polity or state to protect one’s rights. Political offense should be met by political defense and use of force should be the last resort. In this way combination of worldly and spiritual aspects became an important part of Sikh way of life. Guru Teg Bahadur again protested against the forcible conversion of Kashmiri Hindus and met his death as a martyr. Once again Guru Gobind Singh raised his sword to oppose state persecution and founded the order of Khalsa. Khalsa is not purely a political order, as some times it is misunderstood, but saintly attributes are also primary concern of it.

### 4.2.3 Nature of Sikh Polity

Apart from social activities, politics is important facet of the Sikh world-view. On this issue, scholars have no unanimity. One Group of scholars asserts that militant nature of Sikh community, changed under the office of Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh as it was not political since its inception rather it was added later on to face the immediate challenges. Another group of scholars feel that because of military complexion, some negative symptoms crept into the community. The Sikhs became a
martial community losing their spiritual quest and flavor attending only to the secular affairs. In this way, politics started to dominate the spiritual concerns and consequently after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikh society was totally busy into secular issues against the contemporary Mughal rulers. Thus their spiritual character withered away. Sikh Gurus paved the way for the conversion of a spiritual movement into a temporal one.

In fact it was neither a conversion from spiritual to secular nor it was added by later Gurus but was a very part of teachings of the Sikh Gurus since its beginning with Guru Nanak. Politics was not a new dimension introduced by Guru Horgobind but Guru Nanak too had raised his voice against the tyranny committed by the ruling class. In Sikhism spirituality and politics go hand in hand. It equates the worldly aspect of human life with as much seriousness as the spiritual one. The Sikhs are not only soldiers but saints too. A Sikh is an embodiment of spiritual and secular character at the same time. Indian tradition had adopted a passive attitude towards political affairs. Consequently, spirituality was centered on individualism. That’s why they fled to forests and mountains to attain spiritual peace and did not respond to secular issues. They maintained a silent attitude and did not criticize it as an evil. It was an imbalanced outlook of spirituality. Sikh Gurus were conscious about this attitude adopted by the Indian saints and seers. They did not want to create the same imbalance, so they awakened the people socially and politically. The Sikh polity is not of theocratic nature but it is a democratic set up. Wars of the Sikh Gurus symbolize that to uphold the righteousness use of arms and force is lawful if peaceful means had failed. It is a sin to adopt a passive attitude or to not react against tyranny. At this juncture it is the duty of spiritually enlightened person to guide society in secular aspects of life. But use of weapons is not allowed to annihilate the others or to appreciate power as a despot because social equality and political freedom are essential part of Sikh world-view. The historical events of late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reflect the political character of Sikh psyche in no uncertain terms.

A saint-soldier is a man of piety with religious dispositions but when challenged by evil forces he fights against injustice. A Sikh represents balance between idealism and pragmatic situations. He performs his normal duties as a house holder as well as a devotee of God. “The Sikh religion has imparted to its followers their moral and material
progress. It has encouraged worldly success and fulfillment of one’s social responsibilities.”

Teachings of the Sikh Gurus encompasses the matters pertaining to spirit, society and state. The overall viewpoint of community emerges from values and virtues contained in the Sikh scriptures and its associated writings. Thus to be spiritual is not only a private matter but it is closely connected with responsibilities of society to transform it into idealistic state through love, justice, equality and service. Practical relevance and applicability is an essential element of Sikh spirituality. In Sikh context, personal salvation must happen on social and political plains too. “The inner and intimate aspect of Sikh spirituality is contemplation, but service to mankind is its social dimension. A Sikh considers it a privilege to render service to others with tender care, humility and compassion. It is not only an integral part of his religious living; it is also an index of his social ethics.”

We can see that politics is not an end in Sikhism but an instrument to serve the social order in a better way. It is not a means to establish monopoly or hegemony of a particular group, race or creed over others but to uplift the society. The Sikh Gurus worked for spiritual, social and political transformations and aimed at an ideal society which was free from all kinds of discrimination such as of caste, colour, creed etc.

4.2.4 Guru Nanak and Polity

Historically speaking Guru Nanak’s period was dominated by the Muslim rulers who were either Afghans or Mughals. We also find observations of the Guru which are intimately related to the social and political milieu of contemporary times. Social discrimination based on caste, deplorable condition of woman, influence of Islamic culture on Indian life, invasions of Mughals etc. have been referred in Guru Nanak Bani. He was a keen observer of the social-political happenings and functioning of political institutions of his period. According to Guru Nanak rulers have lost their legitimacy to rule as they were cruel and unjust. They drew their authority from military power.

A close analysis of Gurbani proves that epithets associated with royalty have been used for God very frequently. God is addressed as sultan, raja, patshah, shah etc. and with other such titles. In the Sikh tradition, House of Guru Nanak is compared to that of Babur by Bhai Gurdas. In Guru Granth Sahib, we find hymn stating that Guru Nanak initiated the rule of Truth and lived as a raj-yogi. The ultimate source of authority and
prestige in the society, is God. As we try to locate metaphysical concerns of Guru Nanak, we find that rise and decline of states, dynasties, and Kingship happens according to the cosmic will. In the divine court of God, a king will be rewarded according to his deeds.

There are certain references in Guru Granth Sahib which reflect Guru Nanak’s attitude toward civil administration. The ruling elite was dishonest. They were scolded as dogs and vampires who exploited the people. The overall social and political structure was feudal in nature. Here one thing must be remembered that Guru Nanak was not a political thinker in its strict sense but social dynamics occupies a very vital role in his spiritual experience. Being a prophet or Guru, his ontology of society is not that of a thinker. “Negative in the sense, that he was not a political philosopher in the modern sense of the term. He does not build any systematic theory of politics and positive in the sense he definitely had certain clear political ideas about the good polity and these can be culled out from his sacred verses in the Adi Granth.”

His vision realizes that Babur’s attack as an act of cosmic law but for that human beings are themselves to blame. Guru’s sympathy towards suffering people is clear from the accounts given by him. Divine law is also applicable to social norms and laws. Indulgent living of rulers made them devoid of all virtues, which is obviously a drawback for any political set up. Due to their mundane cravings they had lost righteousness. If they remained God fearing and virtuous, wrath of God would have not befallen on them.

Thus the impression that one gathers is that polity would be ideal if the rulers are God fearing and just. An ideal polity ought to guarantee peaceful social life and unexploited economic system. According to Guru Nanak, a true political authority draws its legitimacy from people’s support not from military strength. We should not derive modern democratic ideas from his compositions as his objective was not to establish a State. So, generally Guru Nanak has underlined, irrespective of the nature of the government, the important values and purpose of polity.

We know that Guru Nanak rejects the resignation from active social life and political apathy. Lodhi rulers and their administration had come under strict scrutiny of Guru Nanak. His criticism of Babur’s attack and carnage committed by him, is well reflected in his compositions. All these sufferings of people, made Guru Nanak to shed tears of blood. Above examples confirm that he was not indifferent to current political
happenings and social evils. It indicates that everybody has right to criticize the shortcomings of rulers. Guru Nanak’s dialogue with the siddhas justifies that a spiritually liberated must be a socially and politically committed person and should utilize his potential to serve and elevate human race.

From this perspective, Guru Nanak’s attitude towards socio-political issues was more positive. The ultimate aim of human life can’t be achieved by being indifferent to cultural surroundings. Guru Nanak was aware of the cultural effects of Muslim rule over Indian life. He tells us that how the foreign language, dress and religious practices were being adopted by the Hindus. They were doing so not out of love or appreciation but under the fear to escape from tyranny of Muslim rulers or to win the favour of ruling elite. Guru Nanak chides the Hindus for their hypocrisy as publicly they had adopted Islamic rites and rituals whereas in their homes they practiced their own religion. They had forsaken their own dress, language and rituals. In this way they had tried to compromise with the situation and supported a dual personality.

Guru Nanak exhorts them to abandon the hypocritical way of life. Obviously Guru Nanak professed the freedom of worship. An individual must be free to choose his/her faith. His religion is not a way of ascetic or recluse but that of a virtuous and dignified person. “Guru Nanak symbolizes this revolt within the framework of conditions of his time. This revolt becoming open and armed later on, is in no way contradictory to the stand taken by Guru Nanak.” We can say that Guru Nanak was more conscious about political issues. He expresses his views unambiguously. His criticism of the decadent social order and corrupt political set up suggests that he was also paving a way for afresh world order, “Guru Nanak above all was concerned with solving the paradox or the tragedy of human situation that man while living in this world is not to be of it.”

4.2.5 Doctrinal Basis of Political Dimension

Ideal man as conceived by the Sikh Gurus is regarded as gurmukh. He is neither a saint nor a soldier in isolated terms but a representation of both qualities. So development of man’s total personality was the main concern of Sikh Gurus. For it, they adopted an integrated approach which was a blend of temporality and spirituality. They never subscribed to the idea of dichotomy between the spiritual and the temporal. Human life is an opportunity to cultivate inherent divinity which must result in truthful living. Though
the Sikh Gurus were primarily concerned with spiritual fate of man but socio-political needs were also an important part of their thought pattern. No doubt, they rejected the futility of worldly pursuits as ultimate concerns of human life but they did not deny their significance in the context of life in this world. Sacred and profane are correlative; in fact the very salvation of man depends upon the service of mankind.\textsuperscript{78} The service of mankind may require use of physical force against the unjust at critical junctures. Sikhism subscribes to use of force as a legitimate method for the cause of righteousness.\textsuperscript{79}

A close study of social and political ideas, as propounded by the Sikh Gurus shows that they cherished a social order wherein the political values were not excluded. In fact values of freedom, justice and integration of miri and piri hold the total structure of polity according to the Sikh thought. Equality, universal welfare etc. are some more important values but are included in the above.

\textbf{4.2.5.1 Freedom}

Sikhism is very much concerned with political freedom of the individual. Guru Nanak highlights that Muslim rule over Indian people had imposed certain restrictions on their freedom. Guru Nanak was also aware of the levy of discriminatory taxes on the Hindu masses. Severe criticism of oppression of Muslim rulers by the Sikh Gurus, symbolizes the Sikh view-point regarding the immoral and corrupt administration. Martyrdom of Guru Arjun had sent a clear message to the Sikhs that existence of their faith wold face problems from Mughal emperor. Political dimension of Sikh world-view does not allow anyone to impose his religious faith on the others, even interference in other’s faith is strictly prohibited. Whenever any authority tried to do so, the Sikhs instead of tolerating it, challenged the authority. Guru Teg Bahadur was martyred for the cause because he had encouraged the Kashmiri Brahmins to be steadfast to their faith; though he was not a follower of it. The Sikh Gurus admitted multi-focal or multi-cultural patterns of life, so they recognized the notion of myriad paths to reality and accepted the spiritual essence of every religion. They were also aware of multi-cultural nature of Indian society. Their teachings paved the way for pluralistic society and polity. Morality or code of conduct should not be imposed from outside but it should be gained through psychological transformation. Law and order, sanctioned by the state, should not disturb
the personal freedom of a man but it should maintain the necessary conditions in which right of freedom should prevail.

In spiritual context freedom is an absolute right but some duties are also attached to it. True freedom also requires obedience of rules. Security of freedom lies in submission to cosmic law. In this way, a man can enjoy freedom in its true sense as it helps him to get rid of all types of worldly bondages. Metaphysically, Guru’s efforts to free individual from ignorance leads to the idea that spiritually awakened person should not accept political bondage.

Religious knowledge is converted into socio-political ethos. Man is maker of his own destiny; none except God should be allowed to modify it according to its own choice. In the modern age we see that man has become a machine in the whole dynamics of political system and his existence has been reduced to a digit or vote. He is subject to obey the rules as laid down by modern democratic system. Now freedom of an individual does not dominate the system but is being dominated by political system and its supporting institutions. His choices, desires, emotional and physical needs are modified by social and political set up to sustain its stability. This system does not care for man’s emotional and spiritual aspects. These can be suppressed pretending that law and order is first and foremost priority, indeed it snubs the natural legitimate expression of dissent if any community or group protests against the state policies. According to modern political set up, man is made for society or state, so he should sacrifice himself for the sake of state and society. Man has no individual entity under these political systems, modern set up requires that he should mould himself as polity needs. In this way, here man is not an ultimate judge of social and political institutions but it is his duty to serve the system honestly.

The Sikh Gurus exhort that all political systems and social institutions are intended to help the individual to achieve the ultimate aim of his life. But to achieve this, the society should be organized on the healthy basis of justice, liberty and equality. So oppressive political structures are not recognized by the Sikh Gurus. This vocal approach against tyranny and injustice, took the form of open an armed reaction during the time of sixth and tenth Gurus which is considered contradictory to religious view of Guru Nanak. According to the Sikh Gurus as spiritual weakness leads soul to metaphysical bondages,
similarly physical weakness may land man in cultural cowardice and slavery. As spiritual ignorance is removed by the sabda of Guru or gian, in the same way physical bandage can be abolished by moral and physical courage. Both are not opposite to each other. “Quite contrary to it, the spiritual effort and appropriate social activity supplement and complement each other. Spirituality is to be realized in, and has to find expression in the context of social activity”  

Man’s freedom should not be disturbed at any cost. The Sikh Gurus organized an army not to establish a state but to protect their right to life. If they fought against oppressive rulers, it was not for personal benefits but to vindicate the cause of righteousness. During the 18th century, misl period is very important when every Sikh was considered as an independent ruler. We can conclude that the liberated one works for the welfare of the people, in both the social and the political realm. The state of liberation is not a state of blissful inactivity but of detached action for the good of all. In fact what was established firmly by the Khalsa, was the freedom of conscience. The freedom which the Khalsa won for itself was extended to others. 

It is clear that political set up is a medium in promoting the common interests of mankind. So a Sikh should be helpful to his fellow beings. A Sikh considers it a privilege to render service to others with tender care, humility and compassion. That is why freedom or liberty in Sikhism does not create anarchy but becomes a mode of service to others.

4.2.5.2 Justice

Another important element of Sikh polity is justice. It assures the protection of civilian’s rights and works as a safe guard of human values. “In the beginning of recorded ethical and legal thought the term “Justice” was used as equivalent to righteousness in general. Justice comprised with whole of virtue and complete conformity with approval patterns of moral conduct.” Justice provides the guarantee and opportunity to restore the rights in a legal way. It gives man a freedom to protest against something that is intruded by external factors with the intention to disturb his freedom or other rights. In Sikhism inception of this value was introduced with the teachings of Sikh Gurus. One of the attributes of God, highlighted by the Gurus, is that He is just. “Perfect is the justice of the Creator.”
Sikh Gurus and their followers sacrificed their lives for the cause of justice. Basis of this postulate is the notion of reward according to action. In Guru Granth Sahib, it has been mentioned that one is rewarded by God according to his deeds or misdeeds. So here, idea of judgment by God emerges. Whosoever does wrong has to suffer at the hands of the Dispenser of Justice. For man, righteousness is the primary value that must be secured, even in critical times. So the political system should be organized and operated in such a way that nobody should suffer from injustice. Righteous one should be honored, and wrong doer must be punished. So principle of justice is not important only in physical world but its application is necessary in spiritual life too. Because it is operative in the Divine scheme as well. In Guru Nanak bani, we find that at that time rulers had become butchers ignoring all kinds of moral values. They forgot the very motives for which they were authorized and they became indulgent and corrupt. In a way, they were not worthy of holding seats of authority. Teachings of Sikh Gurus assert that God does not tolerate such unjust persons for a long; ultimately something occurs that restores the balance. It is a theory of Divine Justice. The Divine does not work from celestial plains but is operative and expressed through different persons and incidents. Contemporary rulers had too betrayed the trust and lost the moral justification to rule over the people. So their defeat at the hands of Babur symbolizes the expression of justice delivered by Divine scheme. Guru Gobind Singh describes the mission of his life to restore righteousness while fighting against the evil forces.

The Sikh conception of justice is not limited to only legal and political domains but something wrong on religious and ethical levels is too considered as unjust. The Sikh Gurus condemned acquiring anything which does not belong to you and to accumulate money in sinful manners is morally not right. These immoral practices are thought to be the result of degeneration of morality in public life.

In this way, the Sikh idea of the justice encompasses total life, even metaphysical concerns. Corruption, impartiality, exploitation etc. and everything that decreases the dignity of human beings, constitutes the definition of injustice. In negative terms, all these evils should be removed from society. From positive point of view, justice demands such a political environment or system wherein total growth of human potentials and
faculties would be facilitated. Hence teachings of the Sikh Gurus envisaged an ideal society wherein justice includes all its activities and institutions.⁹⁰

4.2.5.3 Miri-Piri

*Miri-Piri* is another important concept of Sikh polity. Historically speaking this conception was introduced by Guru Hargobind, the Sixth Master after the martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev. Guru Hargobind wore two swords symbolizing the spiritual and temporal authority. It can be said that Sikhism aspires for balance between two distinctive domains of temporality and spirituality. It can be termed as God participating into material world or work in the secular domain. In other words it is descent of Divine into the world of time and space where history rules. Indeed *miri* represents the politics whereas *piri* symbolizes the religious authority. In Sikhism, religion and secular are not regarded in the absolute terms of unity or separation. These two domains are distinct yet associated with each other and they can be differentiated but cannot be separated. Relation between secular polity and religious authority can be understood by the examples of body and soul. A soul without body is an abstract entity whereas body without soul will be a dead matter. In Sikhism, this relation is not of subordination but of cooperation. Guru Gobind Singh in *Bachitar Natak* says that The House of Baba Nanak and the House of Babur both are creation of God. One reigns in the spiritual domain and the other in secular affairs.⁹¹

It means that religious and secular polity, and their institutions are not rooted in the social contract as it is understood by social and political thinkers but have their divine origin. But in the case of conflict between the two, spiritual aspect takes precedence over the worldly affairs. This is the essence of *miri-piri* conception in Sikhism.

During the medieval ages Indian people experienced a political hegemony and suffered tyranny of Mughal rulers. They totally attached themselves to spiritual concerns seeking emancipation in the world hereafter. J. S. Ahluwalia writes that, “In this situation, Guru Nanak ‘socialized’ religion into a mighty revolutionary force for collective amelioration of society and state. Sikh religion, as such, as doctrinally concerned as much with souls relation to God (*halt*) as with man’s relation with society and state (*palt*).”⁹² In this way we see that secular and divine concerns both are emphasized in the *miri-piri* conception. “For the first time in the annals of world
civilization, Sikh religion introduced a qualitatively new and unique concept of the Divine spirit becoming determinate in history, in historical time, through the Guru medium."

Akal Takhat and Harimandir Sahib also embody these two doctrines on institutional level. Both stand for temporal and spiritual sovereignty of Sikhism respectively. Without any type of fusion or subordination to one another, they reveal the significance of miri-piri concept. It not only influenced the historical growth of Sikhism but also played a significant role in redeeming the Indian society. Dr. Gurbhagat Singh writes that God of Sikhism is not just an abstraction. His thought is not only to be grasped philosophically but also to be realized existentially. “This bodily existential relish of God connects the Gurus with the non-aryan dehvadin tradition of Carvak.” On the other hand Advaita Vedanta explains the brahman as an absolute purity and non-dual consciousness. Thus difference is clear between the Indian and Sikh conception of spiritual and temporal doctrines. It was the spirit of miri-piri concept that Sikh Gurus introduced the God who kills demons and punishes egoists, and also protects his devotees. So an ideal man, according to Sikhism, is gurmukh who is not only a spirit oriented being but also conscious on psycho-biological levels too. He responds actively to happenings of the developments taking place in these realms.

4.2.6 Institutional Foundations of Sikh Polity

A careful analysis of Sikh history confirms that besides the religious ideas Sikh Gurus also introduced secular concepts and institutions step by step. Though they are basically spiritual or religious in nature their temporal or secular implications are very significant.

4.2.6.1 Triad of Sangat-Khasla-Panj Pyaras

Firstly it was the institution of sangat which was established by Guru Nanak. Being democratic in nature it decided the issues at local level. Primarily sangat was a religious body that meditated on the sacred teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Devotion to God was its first and foremost task, but gradually, it also started to take up political and social problems of Sikhs. The full authority was conferred upon the sangat as we know through the compositions of the Sikh Gurus that even Guru himself honored its decisions. The
creation of the Khalsa is a logical or natural outcome of the role of *sangat* in early Sikhism.

According to Bhai Gurdas (second) it is *sangat* that was converted into Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh.\(^95\) Khalsa has direct relations with Guru. In some compositions attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, it is said that Khalsa is the very image of Guru and Guru exists within the body of Khalsa.\(^96\) Sainapat talks about the nature of the Khalsa and holds that it is the mystic body of Guru. He also talks of the *jama* (physical form) which Guru Gobind Singh bequeathed to the Khalsa.\(^97\) Koer Singh says that Guru dwells amidst the Khalsa all the time, and the *sarabt sangat* in the visible body (*rup*) being the Guru.\(^98\) Kesar Singh Chibber wrote that Guru is Khalsa and Khalsa is Guru\(^99\). Thus Khalsa is a collective body of the Sikhs. Every member of the Khalsa brotherhood has to be baptized and live a life of prescribed discipline promulgated by the tenth Guru. “Through the institution of the Khalsa in 1699 Guru Gobind Singh sought to ensure that only those individuals were recognized as Sikhs who gave their allegiance directly to Guru.”\(^100\) So, Khalsa is an order of the Sikhs that may use arms against the political tyranny.

Thirdly, common assembly of all the Sikhs would elect a body of five beloved ones (*panj pyaras*). To execute the instructions and decision of the the Khalsa, body of *panj pyaras* is highly respected in Sikhism. Till date it is a very effective body to take up any issue concerning the Sikh polity. Any decision made by *panj pyaras* must reflect the common will of *sangat* or Khalsa Panth. Pritam Singh Gill entitles it as “plural executive”.\(^101\) Its pluralistic nature serves to check the monarchical tendencies. Nobody is given priority, everybody has the right to express his views. Historically, these five beloved ones offered their lives to Guru in 1699 at Anandpur Sahib. After examining their commitment, Guru Gobind Singh initiated them into the order of Khalsa and got baptized himself by them. They were the first five members of the Khalsa Panth. There was no distinction between the Guru and the Sikhs. So Khalsa enjoyed spiritual as well as temporal authority of the Guru and sovereignty was thus bestowed upon the Khalsa Panth. Another important issue, that requires our attention, is that Khalsa was instituted under the divine order in order to fulfill the mission of Guru Gobind Singh.

We can assume a triad of *sangat-panth-panj pyaras* which are the three bodies of political significance but they are not in isolation to each other. Five beloved ones were
chosen and then contentions and other issues of the Panth were entrusted to them. It implies that the political power is passed onto the Khalsa and while taking all decisions they would seek guidance from the Adi Granth. So every issue pertaining to the whole Sikh community is discussed in the sacred presence of Guru Granth Sahib. All major political resolutions (gurmatas) of Khalsa Panth are taken in accordance with the spirit of Guru Granth Sahib. These interrelated political institutions of the Sikhs prepared ground for the Sikh Polity.

We find that whole political and social power is decentralized. Nobody is superior to others. After the end of personal Guruship, spiritual authority was vested in Guru Granth Sahib and decision about temporal affairs came in the hands of the Khalsa Panth. Pritam Singh writes that, “This is the base of our social and political structure. This implies that Guru Gobind Singh terminated the monarchical form of government. The democratic institutions set up by the Guru have been unknown to India since times immemorial.” A new sense of devotionalism was infused by the Guru that changed the psyche of his followers. Authority of administration was given to those who possessed virtues, whose ideal was to serve the human race in the best possible way. Here political authority is not administered by elites but by those talented and enlightened persons who have devoted their lives to the Guru Panth. Thus, Guru Gobind Singh laid the foundation of a common-wealth and confederation type polity.

Relations between central legislature (Khalsa Panth) and local body (sangat) were not concretized due to the crisis faced by the Sikhs. These ideas do need structural and practical shape to prove their validity. Approximately whole of eighteenth century was struggle for the Sikhs to survive. Therefore time and space was not available where these political concepts could take concrete shape. “So a democracy established on the basis of spiritualities, selfless service, and equal distribution of wealth, is the best form of government. This concept of democracy is contribution of Guru Gobind Singh…”

Modern democracies lay more emphasis on fundamental rights as well as on directive principles but economic and political rights are often ignored. Because these rights lead to absolute individualism but Khalsa democracy allows them to flourish to the extent where they do not create an anarchy or chaos but helps to grow society in a harmonized way. Ignorance of these rights creates a conflict in a society that leads to
disturbance and the unity of community disappears. After accepting the existence of others, we can avail the benefits of democratic set up in more effective way. Individual rights and community interests are parallel to one another. In Khalsa commonwealth, free and talented individuality devotes and identifies itself with the teachings of Holy Granth and Khalsa Panth. “A Sikh in the sangat become a sewak, doing work without remuneration, or desire for power vanishes. This produces a sense and emotion of equality which is not found in any political democracy”\textsuperscript{104}

4.2.6.2 Institutions of Sarbat Khalsa and Gurmata:

Both these terms are interlinked. Their informal origin can be found in the initial stage of Sikhism but formally both these institutions existed from misl period to the establishment of Sikh empire by Maharja Ranjit Singh. Former denotes the gathering of representative from/of all groups, sects and denominations of Sikhs whereas later term refers to the decision or resolution passed unanimously in the sacred presence of Guru Granth Sahib. It is believed to be the ‘Word of Guru’, “It was no mere resolution of a haphazard congregation. Gurmata was the will of the Guru, felt in their soul by the assembled Sikhs whose function was of the seers.”\textsuperscript{105} That is why it is called gurmata. Sarbat khalsa signifies the collective assembly of the Panth. Meetings of sarbat khalsa were basically held at Akal Takhat (Amritsar) twice a year on the festivals of Baisakhi and Diwali. Both these institutions became the instruments of power and Sikhs started to chalk out their future plans on these occasions. “Most of the important resolutions were adopted at Amritsar at the time of Baisakhi and Diwali when a large number of Khalsa used to be present…”\textsuperscript{106} “The doctrines of Guru Panth and Guru Granth symbolized the unity of the entire body of the Khalsa and imparted sanctity to gurmatas.”\textsuperscript{107}

Urgent meetings could be held in emergency to discuss any problem. Local problems were decided through sangats, only national problems pertaining to entire Sikh community were discussed in the sarbat khalsa. These institutions played a vital role in initiating a process that led the way to polity and provided the Sikhs a platform to express their corporate will. In this way they started recognizing themselves as an independent community.

These gurmatas were held in such high esteem that nobody even chieftains of misls, could dare to disobey them. One reason was that they were declared after
threadbare discussions leading to consensus among the Sikhs. The second reason was that going against it, would result in alienation or isolation from Panth which would be suicidal. Because after the declaration, every Sikh was expected to abide by it thus “A gurmata was not legally or constitutionally binding even on the members present, but it was morally binding even on those who were not personally present. This was because they all subscribed to the doctrine of Guru Panth and Guru Granth. A gurmatta passed by the sarbat khalsa in the presence of Granth Sahib was alike the command of Guru and had to be obeyed.”

During the discussion everybody was free to participate and express his views on the subject. Though generally sardars (chieftains) took part in the sarbat khalsa but it did not mean that ordinary Sikhs were debarred to participate in the deliberation. “It was neither the sardars assembly nor were the deliberations of the national problems the monopoly of the chiefs. But it was a gathering of the community.”

In fact meetings of sarbat khalsa were held on the norms of equality, unanimity and responsibility. Equality gave right to every member of community to participate in meetings irrespective of any bias i.e. caste, poor-rich, high-low. No sanction from any chief was needed to exercise this right. Everybody was free to participate personally and directly. The second feature was unanimity employed in these meetings because Khalsa Panth was regarded as an embodiment of Guru, so every effort was made to decide unanimously. To maintain this sanctity, different viewpoints were also welcomed. “Therefore, all collective deliberations were conducted in a detached manner. Different viewpoints could be expressed but as they were bound by a solemn pledge of being united in the presence of Guru, the resolutions were carried unanimously.” After the declaration, it was ensured that these decisions must be taken as the will of Panth. In sarbat khalsa, everybody felt the sense of involvement in Panthiic unity. For the common interest of community they can sacrifice their own desires. While participating in the process one was supposed to rise above personal interests. In this way, norm of unanimity was facilitated and it was easily implemented.

In this way, we see that sarbat khalsa and gurmata served as very important institutions or instruments to motivate the Sikhs to evolve an independent political set up. These institutions provided them a mechanism to thrash out the community issues in
accordance with the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. It may look like a democratic ideal but it was more than democratic set up in respect to the freedom of every member not in literal sense but on a pragmatic level too. Therefore, nature of the council of sarbat khalsa looks like confederation or as a decentralized body where except Guru Granth Sahib, nobody presided over the proceedings. The nature and functions of sarbat khalsa can be put under the following categories:

1. To maintain relations with other adjoining political powers either through negotiations or through diplomatic policies.
2. To outline the foreign policy to deal with outsider counterparts.
3. To plan the military operations dealing with invaders or in the favor of Sikhs.
4. To solve the mutual controversies and disputes among the misls.
5. To manage the Sikh Shrines and to preach the teachings of Sikh Gurus contained in the Adi Granth.

We see that to a great extent sarbat khalsa which may be called as confederation of independent states, played a vital role in shaping the Sikh polity. Even in modern times, the Sikh leadership may learn a lesson from these institutions. Though with the passage of time, the Sikh state vanished from the map of world, but it does not means that these institutions have lost their grace and significance. Relevance of these institutions in modern times needs thorough analysis. Whatever reasons might be responsible for the vanishing of such institutions but the ideals put into practice by them will continue to work as beacon lights in Sikh politics for ever.

These institutions contributed to outline the contour of Sikh society. These institutions applied pragmatic and practical test to the Sikh social order that had emerged with the growth of Sikhism. Through these institutional instruments, now sangat is able to implement its decisions in accordance with the teachings of Sikh Gurus more effectively. Gurdwara where sangat assembles is open for men of all castes and creeds, without any discrimination. Regarding the functioning of these institutions Pritam Singh writes that, “As a result of this, both the complexes, of superiority as well as inferiority vanished; the sense of equality began to grow.”

4.2.7 Political Ideas and Historical Growth of Sikhism

4.2.7.1 Idea of the Sikh State
After religion, state claims faithfulness of its subjects. “At one extreme of arguments the state is identified with one or more highly specific features, such as organized police powers, defined spatial boundaries, or a formal judiciary. At the other end of the definitional spectrum the state is regarded simply as the institutional aspect of political interaction; no concrete structure are specified.” In Indian tradition, primary allegiance of man is towards religion. It is not imposed but is instinctive to man. State has proved more powerful than religion in earthly realms. Everybody wants to win favor of state to gain different types of benefits. In history, we find that sometime a conflict emerges between state and religion and later is suppressed by the former in order to establish control over political institutions. On the other hand whatever circumstances may be, a man of religion won’t favor the state to discourage the people aspiring for freedom and justice. His primary allegiance will be towards religion. Guru Granth does not recognize the dichotomy between these two fields but these institutions have been characterized to elevate “hope and glory of man, the social and political context in which the Sikh way of life is to be practiced.”

Though state has been recognized as an important part of man’s social and political destiny but its dominance over religion has been rejected by the Sikh Gurus. State should not interfere in the affairs of church. Both are complimentary and are influenced by activities of one another but do not try to subjugate one another with the intention of suppressing or absorbing. As the history shows, both have become antagonistic entities and in spite of continuous conflict, they exist side by side. The relationship between church and state, in Sikhism, are very clear from the days of Guru Nanak. He opposed the state by raising his voice against the tyranny and evil political set up.

Instruction to the Sikhs to bear arms was another step to draw out the outlines of Sikh polity. According to Kapur Singh it was “in some ways the most remarkable and novel in the whole history of the religious thought.” The Sikh Gurus, who were primarily religious leaders, prophets according to the Sikh tradition, did not consider it neither a decadence from higher status nor a human urge to satiate one’s own temptations. But it was a sacred duty of a cultured and spiritually enlightened person to be a part of armed resistance. We can say that reflected an innate character of Sikhism.
“It is definitely and clearly a matter of doctrine grounded in sound pragmatism and a realistic view of religion, such as Sikhism.”

In Sikhism it is the moral duty of a true citizen to bear arms. In this way, a balance between church and state can be secured. The Sikh Gurus did not support the idea of kingship by divine right. People have right to select their leader in worldly affairs. We see that Guru Gobind Singh declares, “My spiritual dignity and status is wholly due to the Khalsa, otherwise, there are countless millions of worthless men like me in the world. It was the help of people that enabled Guru to acquire learning, and by aid of people he destroyed the enemies.”

It means that victories achieved by the Guru in battlefield are of people. The Guru nowhere shows his inclination to recognize the divine right of earthly kings to be supreme in secular affairs.

4.2.7.1.1 Relation Between State and Society

A society can grow under the protection of the state; however, it is not necessary for any society to have a state. States may consist of single or multi-cultural societies. Both go together yet are not identical in their objectives. Indeed state functions as a protecting arm for the society and society has fewer responsibilities as compared to state. But both have played a crucial role in the development of human race. What we want to say is that state is the primary need of any society to grow and to attain its objectives. “So the ideal, that a particular society wants to achieve, will require the help of the state; without that it will not achieve its purpose.”

A society may go beyond the boundaries of one state or several societies can flourish in the same state.

Sikh Gurus visualized a society different from other paradigms of society i.e. Indic and Semitic but it was impossible to implement the very novel idea without the help of state. So vision of an ideal state was also inherent in their writings. Naturally, formation of a society leads to the establishment of a state. Jealous attitude of the Mughal rulers and Brahmanical priestly class towards the Sikh movement indicates that they were afraid of independent nature of the Sikh society. “History abounds with the incidents when the Sikh society met with tough resistance from the state in its establishment. In the atmosphere of intolerance, on the part of the state, the Sikhs were bound to look to the formation of their own state, because the alternation was extinction at its very birth.”
One thing must be noticed that initially Sikh state was not offensive but actively defensive in nature. So formation of Sikh state was not to satiate the political desires of an individual or a racial group but to secure the original archetypal form of state that should be subordinate to the higher values of the dharma. State is not an instrument to rule over people or to enjoy the sovereignty but to establish the sovereignty of Divine will. According to the Sikh thought, a state without the hold of religion can enforce several types of cruelties. In such conditions, a religious person must resist the evil. The Sikh Gurus and their followers were doing the same task. So it was natural to face the opposition of theocratic monarchy and caste ridden society. The Sikh Gurus defied both the established church in Indian society and the state ruled by Mughal rulers. In fact it was the conflict of ideology. On one side of it was the state and society and, on the other was the Sikh idea of state. It helps us to understand the reasons responsible for the long struggle by the Sikhs against their opponents.

Analysing the relationship between church and state, Kapur Singh, Pritam Singh and Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia have quoted the same stanza from the Bachittar Natak. Every scholar agrees to the point that whole world is embodiment of temporal and religious authorities, metaphysical and secular powers. Therefore state does not possess ultimate authority over the religion but state must provide atmosphere in which autonomy of religion should grow.

4.2.7.1.2 Objectives of Ideal Sikh State

From the above discussion, we can deduce some important concerns that an ideal Sikh state must make efforts to execute them.

1. Right to freedom of worship must be ensured. Guru Teg Bahadur had “suffered the martyrdom for the sake of religion. He gave his head but not his determination.” Guru Amardas prays to God that through whatever way the world comes unto you, save it that wise.

2. Cultural rights of the people must be protected by the state, “Sikh Gurus were of the opinion that man should be free to follow the culture of his choice and to speak the language he likes. There should be no interference or restriction by the State.” In Asa Ki Var, Guru Nanak criticized the rulers and the state of his time for disturbing the cultural rights of civilians.
3. State policies should be framed in such a way that they must fulfill the basic needs of masses and provide them with healthy environment. In ancient India, besides *dharma* and *moksha*, *artha* and *kama* were the rights of people which were taken as duties of the state. Human beings have the right to life and thus to impart materialistic means to facilitate it is the duty of state. These requirements are not a hindrance in devotional life but help man to live in this world. Due to significance of material things, in Guru Granth Sahib, they are sought from God. Bhagat Kabir says that, “Oh God, I can no longer worship you while fighting with starvation, get your rosary back from me.”

In this way, material needs are an integral part of Sikh world-view. In Guru Granth Sahib, Bhagat Dhanna invokes God for such things as well. Guru Arjun says, “Remember the Lord, whose are all the Gifts which we receive. Thirty six kinds of delicious diets to eat, comfortable couches, cool wind and enjoyment of pleasures.” Guru Nanak asserts that, “He alone, O Nanak, knows the way, who earns with the sweat of his brow and share it with the others (the needy)” It means that a state must create or cultivate an atmosphere where such an ideal life would have been practiced. Bhagat Ravidas underlines the ideal of *begam pura* where as Guru Arjun calls it *halemi raj*.

4. A fundamental aim of an ideal state is to promote *dharma* or to dispense justice. In western world many political thinkers have interpreted it in different theories. Sikh Gurus were well familiar with dispensation of justice that’s why they criticized the *kazi* who by taking bribe indulges in injustice. “It is the state which is to ensure that justice is done to all. God himself is Just. He never does injustice. The culprit can escape the human judge but he can’t escape from the court of God.” According to Gurbani justice is the *raison d’etre* of a ruler. Otherwise he is not fit to occupy the seat of authority.

5. A state should not discriminate against a section of society on the basis of caste, colour and creed. From the very inception of Vedic times Indian society has been divided into four *varna*. “*Varna* or colour and *Jati* or race is the two commonest words in Indian languages which are interchangeably used to denote caste.” According to the Sikh Gurus, a state should not ask the caste of anyone but realize...
the Lord’s light within him,\textsuperscript{133} because caste has no merit in God’s presence where everybody will be rewarded according to his deeds. Realization of the God is not only Brahmin’s birth right, “only Brahmin is who knows the God and is ever attuned.”\textsuperscript{134} Similarly \textit{khatri} is he, “who is a hero in deeds and dedicates his body by compassion and charity.”\textsuperscript{135} Thus according to the teachings of Sikh Gurus caste system is not divinely ordained but it is a man made division to exploit the others. So in the name of God no one should be discriminated against caste or religion. In \textit{Asa Ki Var} Guru criticizes the contemporary rulers for their superiority complex. The idea of state conceived by the Sikh spirit is universal in nature.

6. Education, health and livelihood are the primary needs of people. In ancient India these were categorized according to the caste system. Education, health and livelihood were strictly associated with \textit{brahmin}, \textit{kashatriya} and \textit{vaishya} respectively. \textit{Sudra} was deprived all of this and had no right to enjoy or share these facilities. But Sikh Gurus broke the hegemony of these castes, and allowed their Sikhs to participate in every field of life. Nothing is reserved for anybody. So they opened the gate of education, health and trade for everybody by patronizing education, encouraging good health and promoting trade. The Sikh Gurus state that a human should gain knowledge for the orientation of mind\textsuperscript{136} and should exchange his views with others,\textsuperscript{137} even they highlighted intellect and knowledge as subservient to God that brings respect to man.\textsuperscript{138}

Sikh Gurus realized the significance of education that’s why so many learned scholars were patronized by the House of Guru. Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Nand Lal and 52 poets of Guru Gobind Singh’s royal court are prominent examples. It is also said that Guru Gobind Singh translated the Persian and Sanskrit texts into \textit{gurmukhi} to enrich the knowledge of his Sikhs. Sikh state was desired to promote education, health and trade. Guru Angad particularly established two independent schools for education and health at Khadur Sahib. Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh instructed their Sikhs in warfare. Guru Arjan encouraged his Sikhs to deal in trade of horses. He invited various types of traders and asked them to settle in Amritsar for the purpose of trade and commerce.

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4.2.7.2 Concept of Ruler

In every country thinkers and spiritual leaders have put forward many methods and theories to establish an ideal state but misuse of state power too has been observed frequently. Rulers often try to control the state according to their own desires. In this way, we can imagine the role of a ruler to administer a state. Most of medieval kingdoms were patriarchic in nature based on divine origin theory of kingship.

In India duties assigned to a king or ruler existed in some form or the other but the concept of *ram rajya* was very familiar to the folk mind of India. It reflects the attributes of ideal king and kingdom. In such an ideal state nothing happens like unrighteousness. Two great epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, describe the duties, qualifications and merits of a true king. Both are related with *rajya dharma*. Their heroes are spirit oriented rulers who took arms obviously to annihilate the evil forces.

The Sikh Gurus neither formulated any particular type of government nor propagated a theory in the strict sense. Reason behind this, is that they were not concerned with the nature and functions of a political set up but were aware of the qualities and responsibilities of a true ruler. “While giving the ideas on politics the Sikh Gurus had welfare state in their minds. They did not commend any particular form of state unlike other political philosophers. They were more concerned with the qualifications and duties of a ruler.”

In Guru Granth Sahib the ideal state has been described as *halemì raj* and *begampura* but it is also to be noticed that these terms are used more in spiritual context and less in secular context. Basically the Sikh Gurus believed that a human being possesses an element of divinity. So social, political and economic concerns for a Sikh, turns into spiritual context ultimately. But as a human being, who is made of flesh and blood, he also faces same problems like fellow beings. Though as a spiritual being he remains primarily related to his religious concerns but also responds to socio-cultural developments. Through these concerns he participates in history of time and space too. Faced by critical situation he can’t remain silent but comes forward to face crisis actively. Thus polity also comes under the purview of Sikh psychology.

After analyzing Gurbani and Sikh history, we find that in Sikh conception, the ruler is not a person totally driven by political motives but rules over the unjust standards
of immorality in public life. Political system should be organized in such a way that it must facilitate man to achieve his goal i.e. nam-simran and moksha. He should not follow or adopt any policy that may lead him to astray. “So a ruler, in Sikhism, should be one who creates such conditions of his subjects as well as for himself so that the ultimate aim of life be achieved easily. Not only that he should not become an obstacle in the path but also he should be helpful by creating a good and peaceful atmosphere in his kingdom.” Guru Nanak desired that none else but a worthy person should sit on throne. Besides he must have silenced the five desires. According to Guru Amardas, “The king alone must sit on the throne, who is worthy of it. He who realizes the truth, he is worthy king.

Gurbani declares that God is the ultimate king who is just and takes care of the world. In Sikh history we see that the Ten Sikh Gurus are also regarded as saccha patshah (the true king). Though the term, to a great extent, was used in religious context but possibility of political context can’t be ruled out. We witnessed that during their struggle with Mughal rulers after the death of Guru Gobind Singh they derived political motivation from Sikh scripture and the tradition laid out by the Sikh Gurus.

In Guru Granth Sahib, Janak has been recognized as an ideal or perfect ruler. He is the ruler who embodies the qualities of saint-soldier a king with his peerless personality. These two qualities are very rare combination that is found in Raja Janak. Due to it, he has been highlighted as a model King not only in Sikh scripture but in whole of the Indian tradition. He has been described as a ruler who had fastened the chariot of his mind to a peaceful state. Interestingly, Guru Ramdas is equated with the qualities of Raja Janak “Through you, the benign rule of Janak has again come to world; the age of truth has dawned.” Guru Ramdas also writes about the humbleness of Janak. “Janak seated on his kingly throne, anointed his forehead with dust of feet of nine seers.” Guru Amardas says, “Who himself is true, his throne is true, only such a king can deliver the true justice.” Keeping in the mind this discussion, we can say that the first quality of ruler, according to Gurbani is that he/she should be an enlightened soul. Only such a person can rule the world full of dualities. King should transcend the physical dichotomy to manage his reign and to use his political powers effectively.

4.2.7.2.1 Raja-Yogi as a True Ruler
Sikhism also emphasizes the notion of *raj-yoga*. Here *yogi* is both a spiritually awakened person as well as householder too. Similarly, word *raja* also goes beyond its literal meanings and incorporates the meaning of a *yogi* too. In a way, here words fail to convey the exact implications because the reality or object they express is beyond literal context. To understand the crux of this conception, writings by *bhatts*, that occupies an honored place in Guru Granth, are very helpful. Bhatt Kalsahar has explained this term in Guru Granth Sahib. According to these minstrels, Sikh Gurus bear the title of *raj-yogi* in its true sense. Ruler must be distinctive from common men and should conquer the self to be fit for the throne. Control of mind leads to control over world. A worldly king is also a servant of servants. “He forsakes covetousness, avarice and evil from his mind, in his fortress he proclaims his victory and returns not vanquished ever. He, who calls himself the lord’s servant but replies to him in defiance, surely will lose his wages and will not be seated on the throne.”

Thus according to the philosophy of Sikhism a ruler must imbibe virtues and should be free from greed, sin and illusion. He is not an ordinary man because his extraordinary qualities, merits, disposition have made him a man of truth. In other words, firstly a ruler should have won over the evil i.e. inner negative forces with the weapon of gnosis (*अज्ञान धन्य*). Its political implications may be that a ruler must fight against injustice, corruption and other social and moral evils. So his primary aim is not to enjoy the vast estates, beautiful gardens and various kinds of entertainment, but must have remembered the Lord amidst such luxuries. Only such a person deserve to rule, who inculcates the virtues of *gian* (wisdom) and *vairag* (detachment). A ruler or king must be careful that while enjoying all these gifts of God, he should not forget the name of Lord. Guru Nanak has elaborated it beautifully in a hymn of Sri Raga.

Foregoing discussion suggests that a ruler must follow God in respect to justice. So dispensation of justice is not only a moral duty in socio-cultural-political context, but a religious accountability as well. It is justice that makes him pure and truth practiced assures stability of kingdom. It has been remarked in Gurbani that, “In whose court justice is ever administered. He is self dependent and leans on none.” In case a ruler becomes corrupt and indulges in injustice, he loses the right to rule. Thus corrupt means, use of religion and scriptures for political purposes have been condemned by
the Sikh Gurus. “In such a situation it becomes the duty of the ruler to ensure that there is no corruption in his department of judiciary.” Protection of his subjects from foreign aggression and exploitation, fulfilling their basic needs, no interference by state in fundamental rights of citizen, proper distribution of resources, unity etc. must be maintained by a true ruler.

4.2.8 Akal Takhat: Symbol of the Sikh Polity

Akal Takhat since its inception has played an important role in determining the socio-political destiny of the Sikhs. According to Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha it is the raj singhasan of the Sikh community. It was founded by Guru Hargobind, the Sixth Guru after the martyrdom of Guru Arjun. “Initially it was named as akal bungha, later on it came to be known as Akal Takhat, throne of God that is beyond time and space.”

“There stood a mountain of earth near its site. Baba Budha and Bhai Gurdas are believed to have got it leveled and bricks laid.” Dr. Gurbacchan Singh Nayyar writes that, “Guru Hargobind taking Bhai Gurdas and Baba Budha to the present site of Akal Takhat, where a raised platform already existed, laid the foundation of the Takhat prophesying that it would become lofty and majesty in due course of time.”

“The Takhat stands in the close proximity to the holy shrine of Sikhs…, in front of Sri Akal Takhat, there are two very tall flag posts…signifying the religious and temporal sovereignty of the Khalsa.”

Here Guru Hargobind used to hold darbar wherein secular affairs were discussed and solutions were sought. Besides Guru started donning princely robes and adopted title of sachapatshah. He also introduced martial games and martial tunes. Modern historians, like I.B. Benerji, G.C. Narang, Hari Ram Gupta etc. misunderstood it as a beginning of militarism, the transformation or evolution but “Guru was not a militarist as he fought to uphold the glory of faith, not to win battles and to carve out an empire.”

Before noon Guru attended the sacred assembly of Sikhs in Harimandir and late noon moved to Akal Takhat to hold his court. According to Niharranjan Ray, it was the “unique way in which spiritual sovereignty and temporal authority are conceived of in Sikh doctrine and institutionalized in Sikh History.” Guru Hargobind who established the institution of Akal Takhat was considered as a dal bhajan and guru bhari by Bhai Gurdas. During misl period decisions (Gurmata) delivered by sarbat khalsa were held at this place. Even
in modern times, edicts issued by jathedar of Akal Takhat are regarded as order of the Panth, because they derive their sanctity and power from the collective will of the Sikhs.

Doctrinally speaking, Akal Takhat highlights the interaction and relationship between religion and politics, and also embodies the conception of mutual interdependence of church and state. Generally, both ideas appear as contradictory to each other. But Sikh Gurus held the union of two as essential and established balance between saint and soldier, sacred and profane. That’s why “the Sikh concept of dharma yudh is a vindication of freedom of religious belief. It stands for holy war against religious intolerance and tyranny.”

Another important aspect which Gurbacchan Singh Nayyar has highlighted is that, Akal Takhat was established not only in response to contemporary situation but also was founded under the divine mission. He refers the Gurbilas Patshahi Chevin by Sohan Kavi that “He (Sohan Kavi) attributes the foundation of the Akal Takhat to Guru Hargobind in response to a direct injunction of the Almighty. For Sohan Kavi, the Akal Takhat was founded with a Divine will and sanction behind it.”

Kapur Singh, a renowned Sikh philosopher and thinker brings out a new dimension regarding the word ‘Takhat’ particularly and ‘Akal Takhat’ generally. He attempts to analyse the philosophical connotations in relation to Indian context. According to him Takhat is closely connected with the concept of time and space and Hindu space is flat four directional that “encompassed the entire phenomenal world, samsar, the reality that is appearance and the religion as it impinges upon the minds of men while it is permanently there in the souls of all men who flourish in relation to his space”

According to him there are two categories of holy places in Hindu tradition. First is sthapat means established and the second is svayambhu means forever there. Established places are those which are, historically speaking, created at a point of time and self-existent places are those which are there since the inception of universe, but discovered through a sign or by some spiritual authority in divine dream or meditative intuition. Temples related with Vishnu or Siva is of that kind. Further taking ahead the insight of Kavi Sohan, he asserts that Akal Takhat too belongs to the svayambhu status. They are not subject to any historical evidence or a contingent point of time. He writes, “These takhats do not originate and are not validated by historical occurrence, though
they may be accidentally associated with the birth or sojourn of a Sikh Guru or it may be the case, that as Akal Takhat, it was ‘built up’ and signified by a Sikh Guru. These takhats essentially are and remain svyambhu, ever there and no body or no contingent occurrence has created them.”

In fact he was engaged in debate on the number of Takhats four or five when SGPC had initiated a process to declare Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo) as the fifth Takhat. He argued that “four is a perfect number ecumenical in significant and grounded in the ancient metaphysical postulates of our race, while ‘5’…is not a significator of ‘space’ or territory while a takhat must be such a significator.” Kapur Singh was of the view that these four takhats have been assigned to four cardinal directions. In this way they represent the universality and perfection of the Khalsa sovereignty over the universe. In a way, Kapur Singh was opening a way for the independence of Sikh state and its validity by using Indian metaphysical tenets.

Akal Takhat belongs to Sikhs only but it embodies the experience of timeless reality that is free from any type of physical or cultural bondage. Its responsibilities are beyond the universe so it should be independent from any type of particular discipline of polity. Its jurisdiction is not confined to Sikhs but is whole of humanity. According to Dr. Gurbhagat Singh most of institutions are established to maintain the rule by a government. “Political economic and social institutions are created by ruling class to shape the human understanding, according to their own desires, they will mould the mind and body of subjects, accordingly intellectual freedom or independent will power is taken away by them.” Human body and mind are affected to a great extent by system, agencies and institutions because state presents those ideals or ideas which will appeal to the physical inclinations of man. Such products are brought into the market, which enslave the psychology of people through their attractive or sophisticated look of matter. Thus a state exploits masses by controlling their desires, senses and tastes and people are made to indulge or to be passive by accepting ideals and ideas proposed by the state. Gurbagat Singh writes that “oppressive authority and its institutions snub the human life. They enslave the inner potential and bodily chemicals with the intention to serve the state.”
In fact Sikh Gurus wanted to protect the human psychology from such subtle designs of the state that is why they created the throne of timeless God. They preferred the authority of God on earth. Such political systems try to delimit personal freedom of man and misuse his potential just to maintain the political power. Thus man becomes an instrument, that has no choice except to be faithful to state at every cost. In such an authoritative polity man can’t express his full faculties and talent to contribute the socio-cultural life on this planet. From this point of view, Akal Takhat not only advocates the freedom of man but that of every culture, race, tribe, creed, religion etc. This institution rejects and challenges of those powers which follow the homogenized patterns of polity. Akal Takhat stands for testimony of mind, body and soul free from the control of state.

Sikhism attributes the Guru and Godhead as *saccha patsha*. For Sikhs, Guru is not only a spiritual preceptor but a political leader too. Symbols and epithets used for the Sikh Gurus carry political connotation as well. According to Rai Balwand and Bhai Satta “a royal umbrella is flying over the head of Guru who is beseated on Throne.” Same feelings have been expressed about the Guru Arjun “Canopy is shining over the head of Guru Arjun while sitting on the throne.” Naturally, the question arises that why these symbols are being used for a spiritual personality, whether these are being employed consciously or unconsciously. Even Sikh Guru has employed concepts and notions pertaining to secular polity. Guru Nanak says that only an eligible person deserves seat of a king and in *Dakhani Onkar*, once again emphasize that if he does not fulfils the conditions then he must vacate seat for another right one. In accordance with Guru Nanak, Guru Amardas repeated the same views.

Above mentioned views suggest that Akal Takhat was established on the very model of Sikh Gurus that they had expressed in their sacred writings. Its authority should not be misunderstood merely in the theo-spiritual sense of the term rather it is a symbolic seat of worldly power vested in the people. As already said that, Sikh Gurus also provided guidance to their Sikhs in socio-cultural domains and the creation of Akal Takhat implies that “for the first time in the history of religious thought, Sikh philosophy brings forth the concept of God-in-history. God’s descent into time, that is history, is through the vehicle of Guru who as such partakes of the temporal as well as the spiritual sovereignty and authority.”
4.3 Economic Dimension of the Sikh World-View

Economy is very much an essential component of any world-view. Philosophy and history affect the economic development of each religion. A religion emphasizing on other worldly attitude prepares man for the next world ignoring poverty and economic disparities. So man is expected to live a life of pessimism remaining inactive in society. Asceticism, renunciation etc. are prominent features of such religious systems but a religion claiming this worldly attitude asks man to develop and improve the economic, social, political and cultural surrounding to a higher status. It aspires to build the economic system based on ethical norms. “The rise of Protestantism against the Catholic church in the west also proves the point that a religion which lays emphasis on this worldly aspect has, more potential for economic development.” For such a religion, religiosity is not only based on man’s attitude towards spiritual ideals, but a way of transformation of society too.

Economically and politically Mughal rulers used it for urban development in different areas. Poverty is a curse that causes starvation, loot, death etc. In other words, materially poor persons often become victims to the selfish ends. That’s why economy is regarded as foundational stone of any state. Without the prosperity of people, the structure of state would crumble down even it would be impossible to maintain its sovereignty. Economically, continuous advancement ensures the stability of a country.

4.3.1 Indian Context of Economy

Talking about the Indian context of materialism, we know that Vedic tradition, Jainism and Buddhism rejected the way of absolute materialism. Rather they were more concerned with the transcendental way to realize their objective. But on the other hand, there were also persons who asserted their ideas about materialism to follow it as a sole end of life. Kautilya’s Arthasastra and Kama Sutra of Vatsyana signify the importance of tangible phenomenon for their traditions. Besides these, there is Lokayata that advocates the absolute affirmation of material pursuits. Another name given to this way of living is Charvaka. It was way of pure hedonism and stood against the dharma and moksha emphasizing the kama and artha aspects. While denying the existence of God, adherents of this doctrine accepted the tangible world as an ultimate reality. Tantric cults also favored the satisfaction of senses. In Indian tradition this tendency is termed as dehavad;
in this context after finding the elements of world and life affirmation charge of pessimism, escapism, dogmatism etc. become questionable.

Sikhism has developed different and distinctive approach to life. For this purpose it identified the Indian concepts to convey its divine message and interpreted them from different angles. After a long struggle the Sikhs took the reins of government in Punjab. Evidences show that continuous flow of resources in voluntary form solved their financial crisis.

We are familiar with the fact that people were suffering from great poverty and financial problems. Above all, rulers were too exploitative in nature. Naturally, there was a strong reaction to the oppressive state machinery. That is why we find ample information concerning contemporary economic situation, disparities, ownership and business practices in the Guru Granth Sahib. Mostly it has been an impression that religiosity reduces material needs of human beings. This attitude results in low grade development but economy wants to enrich the human life with material comforts. Indian saints and seers would retire to mountains and forests to achieve spiritual goals after the renunciation of worldly life. Gautam Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, also gave up his princely life for inner enlightenment. But Sikh Gurus considered both subjects important for human welfare and laid stress on fulfillments of those material or physical needs which are imperative to healthy social living and devised methods to remove poverty. “It has advocated the disciplined material life of a house-holder, blending spiritualism and materialism in a fine balance and creating a class of Gurmukhs. These Gurmukhs should prefer a high standard of life rather than a high standard of living i.e. life comforts, etc.”

During the time of Guru Nanak war–like situation had weakened India. Rulers, through their officers, exploited their subjects, and the administration had become so corrupt that judges and ministers had lost their sense of justice. He says that, “The kings are like lions and their officials like dogs who disturb the restful people. The officials are like the nails of king which make wounds and blood is licked.” The Brahmins, who claimed to be the custodians of Hinduism, were too greedy. Guru Nanak remarks that, “Priests have forgotten their crafts. They dance, wear masks…and uphold wars. Ignorant Pandits with subtle reasoning and tricks of these trade strip men and they amass
wealth.” They were themselves ignorant of real knowledge of the divine. For their selfish motives, they had commercialized the religious practices. Rites and rituals were their instrument to exploit people.

Brahmins were not practicing what they were preaching. “Indian society was in the grip of the Brahmins who had devised ceremonies based on orthodox views which worked as tools for pretending the people’s ignorance.” On the other hand, many schools of philosophy were preaching their ideas, with the aim of renovating Hinduism. Buddhism and Jainism had already lost their importance. Charvak philosophy believed in enjoying life to its full extent whatever means may be. This view was opposite to the yogis who lived in forests and mountains and for their sustenance they depended upon begging.

In the field of agriculture, feudalism was the prevailing system. The king had allotted vast lands to his ministers and other landlords. Rulers and their officials terrorized the labor and peasantry class. We can easily outline that due to poor administration human values had declined. “The businessmen amassed wealth by exploiting poor and the weak, both rural and urban. Business was not value oriented but was based on the principle of self gratification. The traders felt no social responsibility and the bankers indulged in all bad practices of usury which resulted in exploitation of the poorest.” Exploring the revolutionary concern in economic system of India, in religious context, Dr. Diwan Singh elaborates that “when the Aryans were land-lords and rulers, all the vaishyas were exploited miserably as they had to keep the brahmins and kshatrayas aloft and well going. When the tyrants, the Turks and Mughals, took the reins in their hands they too depended on the land revenue…consequently exploited the tillers still more.” Work culture was totally on the decline in the religious context. Religious personalities were not addicted to work rather manual work was degraded.

Brahmins were dependent on the donations of vaisyas and kshatriyas. Vaisyas were further dependent on agriculture, animal husbandry and local trade but they were being exploited by religious and ruling class. Shudras were leading a badly marginalized life. They had no right but to serve the others. Begging was a common institution and was respected religiously. There are no signs of work culture in brahmins during middle ages. Many of them became ascetics and sanyasis who roamed about in the villages and towns
for begging. Guru Nanak says that ascetics are running after clothes and food\textsuperscript{187} and disguise themselves in many ways for the sake of alms to satisfy their hunger.\textsuperscript{188} He criticizes that they don’t feel shame while begging from home to home.\textsuperscript{189} It must be remembered that Sikh Gurus do not reject the spiritual significance of \textit{daan} (charity) but condemned the life style of priestly class which was earning his livelihood without any manual work by depending wholly on the hard working people engaged in productive work.

\textbf{4.3.2 Doctrinal Assumptions of Sikh Economy}

Sikhism is a spiritual and this worldly religion that also stands for the improvement of material world through service and aims at to serve the humanity. It does not accept any demarcation between spiritual and secular. Though economic issues and religion seems to be opposite but for the Sikh Gurus they are correlated. In Sikhism emancipation is not attained by renouncing the world but by living in it. Thus their emphasis on worldliness and life of householder provided a strong economic base. Along with this the Sikh Gurus had commented upon issues like trade, banking and feudalism. They were very sure that the economic problems could not be solved unless the character of an individual was raised to a high level. This ideal man was \textit{gurmukh}. To set an example, Guru Nanak himself openly sided with ‘have nots’.

\textit{Deg-teg fateh} is an important ideal of Sikhism in this regard. It stands for material prosperity and protection of poor or down trodden by sword. This slogan means that these powers are for the well being of humanity. To institutionalize their ideas, Guru Nanak established a town known as Kartarpur, where he worked in the fields like a farmer with his followers. Guru and his Sikhs lived together, worshiped together and worked together. “They (Sikh Gurus) were practical organizers, who translated their ideas into action. Guru Nanak was the first to experiment with commune life, four centuries before the Russian Revolution. After his successful journeys, he settled in Kartarpur and set up commune. At this collective form the Guru with his \textit{sangat} ploughed, reaped and worked together.”\textsuperscript{190} The Sikh Gurus knew that gratification of human desire of senses is impossible. “The more you quench your hunger for food and delicacies, the more it rises again and again.”\textsuperscript{191} But they were also aware to provide a proper infrastructure to satiate material needs. \textit{Nam japo, kirat karo} and \textit{vand chhako} has
immense value in this context. It is clear that Sikh Gurus were aware of the economic needs and their proper means, so that human being could survive and live a life of dignity.

A high standard of living is permissible in Sikhism but our heart must have true nam of God. Because all objects are not end in themselves rather have an intermediate position for spiritual cause. Material advancement is not an end in itself; it must result in social responsibility. Concept of vand chhako implies that restraints on distribution must be applied; otherwise some persons will have in excess whereas others will suffer from starvation. It suggests the unnecessary accumulation and wastage of resources is prohibited in Sikhism. Everyone has right to earn by honest means but it must be shared with the others. “In other words, he is advising us to invest our resources for well being of others, or only then can greater income accrue. Thus Guru established a relationship between investment and income”

Other implication that emerges from the teachings of Sikh Gurus is that what we eat, it also affects our mind, body and soul. In Indian tradition, objects or things have been categorized on the basis of their influence of energy in the philosophical terms. The grosser form of energy (tama), the active form of energy (raja) and pure form of energy (satva) are collectively known as three gunas. The tama energy in matter diverts our mind from positivity and makes our mind, body and spirit idle. Whereas raja creates a mixture of tama and satva, and inspires for active participation. Satva nature of matter is regarded as more positive that stimulates the spiritual concerns within body. Natural and simple diet is preferred by saints and other religious personalities. Sikh Gurus were in favour of consumption of satva and raja material. This type of diet helps in obtaining economic goals. Though body is a vehicle of soul but not less important than soul, socioculturally it must be nourished properly. Sikhism denies the extreme and exclusive life of luxuries therefore too much indulgence in material pleasures is prohibited. Kirat karo symbolizes the production oriented life whereas vand chhako implies the consumption based aspect of matter preferred by the Sikh Gurus to asceticism. Salvation can be attained by maintaining a balance between spiritual and temporal concerns. According to the Sikh experience, “cursed is the food and robes one wears. Cursed is the body, family that attains not the lord.” While living in the world man has to perform his duty.
Assertive action emerging from extreme ego binds beings but action without any desire of reward, consequently frees him.

4.3.3 Organization of Economic Resources

According to the Sikh thought, man should eat to live but not live to eat. There is no restriction on food, drink and dress but they should not pollute the mind in any way. Suitability of food is determined by its affects on body. Sikh Gurus cursed such life that led to eat and swell the belly. Fasting is nothing to do with spirituality. In Sikhism human body has been regarded as pure and a pious gift by God. Food, water, fire, salt and butter are the product of the Holy. Food has more value than just as a material. The latent significance of food was also highlighted by Prof. Puran Singh when he says that “Wealth, material, prosperity, or symbolically in one word bread, is thus a reality not only to be reckoned with but to be respected and honored…”. Though primary concern of Sikhism was spiritual but social as well. The Sikh prophets wanted to develop man into an all-round personality. According to it, ideal person should work hard to earn his livelihood and be spirit oriented while sharing and helping others. It means that theories of production, distribution and consumption are also of great concern to Sikh Gurus. We find some clues of these theories in a synthesized form in their writings.

In short, Firstly kirat karo’ belongs to the theory of production where as vand chhako implies the idea of proper distribution and balanced consumption. Through this idealism Gurus wanted to mould the economic behavior of their followers. They wished economic prosperity and abundance of resources. Under mentioned hymn symbolically represents the very idea: Let the rivers be cows and ocean full of milk and butter. This earth be sugar and enjoyment even for human beings. But all this should be through honest means. The second component of production is the rejection of begging. Sikh Gurus criticized those ascetics and yogis who having left their homes; visit the others for the purpose of food. So everybody must live and earn livelihood personally. It is also a part and parcel of religious life. Third aspect is the prohibition to exploit the others. They warned their followers on this issue that to possess what belongs to others is like beef for a Hindu and swine for a Muslim. The Guru will recognize those who do not have ill-gotten wealth.
Thus we see that their theories of production, distribution and consumption were against the misappropriation of resources. Sikhism was a totally new experiment in the history of religions and religious thought, because so many innovations happened in the House of Guru for the first time in the Indian history. To meet their purpose, Sikh Gurus introduced new ideals and institutions. Guru Nanak established *langar* that was developed by Guru Amardas. Guru Amardas also invented *manji* system and Guru Arjun created *masand* system for collection of *daswandh*. In this way they provided a scope for new experiments which benefitted the people.

Fourth component of the Sikh economic system is that it stresses the public sector activities. Wherever Gurus went, they encouraged their followers to establish *dharamsals*. These were built not only for devotional purpose but also ensured participation in common secular projects. Common kitchen, digging of wells, tanks etc. were other public sector activities which were patronized by the Sikh Gurus.

Fifth important aspect of this economic dynamism is that Sikh Gurus valued the contribution of craftsmen like shoemakers, carpenters, pot makers, and other small artisans who were the main manufacturers of items of daily use at that time. It happened in Sikh history frequently that Gurus accepted the invitation of honest poor but on the other hand declined invitation of the rich who indulged in foul practices. To expand economic activities they founded new cities and in due time, these cities developed into important centers of trade and commerce where spiritual environment was not absent. Even they encouraged foreign trade particularly of horses. They sent their agents to central and west Asian countries for the above purpose. At the establishment of Amritsar, the Sikh Gurus invited master craftsmen from all over India to enhance its productive activities. Thus they patronized a system of financial co-operation. In this way Sikh Gurus reshaped the idea of economy both in theory and practice. They brought forth theories of production, distribution and consumption totally in a novel context.

### 4.3.4 Management and Mode of Investments

Within due time, Sikhism evolved a network on vast scale. As Sikhism grew more its needs also increased. We come to know distinctive resources and modes of investment invented by the Sikh Gurus. Some of them were voluntary and some were obligatory. There were three major sources of finance during the Guru period.
Since the inception of Sikhism, disciples of the Sikh Gurus were very devoted to them. They had complete faith in Guru Nanak and his successors. For them he was a divine preceptor, who had opened the gate of emancipation for them. So they were ready to sacrifice everything they had, for the sake of Sikh Gurus. To express their devotion they used to offer different things as a mark of respect. As the institution of Guruship was established very well and numbers of devotees had increased, quantum offerings also increased. Whatever amount of offerings might be and it was voluntary which was put in a common box known as golak.

Up to the times of Guru Arjun, devotees of the Sikh Gurus could be found throughout India and beyond it. Expenditure on the new projects required finance. Therefore Guru Arjun thought of to sustain the ongoing projects. He thought of donations and offerings on regular basis. Accordingly every follower was expected to contribute one tenth of his income to Guru’s house. Accordingly, he asked the Sikhs to pay one tenth of their earnings in Gurdwaras or to spend this money on public interest without any desire of reward. It was the devotions of disciples that they maintained this tradition of charity during Guru Period. In some exceptional cases there may be defaulters but they were not punished because the offering was totally optional. This institution was known as daswandh. It provided a strong base to run the community projects on bigger scale speedily.

There were occasions when the Sikh Gurus asked the Sikhs to contribute in common projects. Guru Hargobind for the first time wrote the Sikhs to meet contemporary needs. Following the last order of his father, he maintained a regular army. It must be remembered that organization of army was not a polity inspired idea. Mughal emperor had persecuted Guru Arjun, father of Guru Hargobind without any reason. So Guru Arjun, before his demise had also asked his son to maintain an army. Thus it was a necessity to organize an army in order to protect the lives of the Sikhs who were being forced to give up their own faith. In such a situation, Guru Hargobind ordained his followers to offer horses, arms and their young family members.

Masand system also proved to be a very useful system for the collection of daswand and offerings. These masands were very trusted persons to whom devotees can deposit their offerings and other things. “This system was quite in contrast to the
prevailing system of the Mughals where an individual was required to deposit the amount, failing which force was used against it." Account of deposited amounts was kept properly and it was ensured that the utilization of this offering must be fair and every type of dealing in financial matters should be transparent. It enabled the Sikh Gurus to confront the Mughal armies on very systematic lines. A military force known as the order of the Khalsa, was raised by Guru Gobind Singh.

4.3.5 Purpose of Economy

The main purpose of Sikh economic system is to serve the people. “Service is the be all and end all of this economy. No doubt, development takes place in the economy but with the objective of meeting the essential needs of all the people. Within framework of this economy, every individual serves himself as well as his fellow beings by engaging in some productive work. In it every individual is a producer as well as a consumer at the same time.”

We observe that in Sikhism society, polity, economy all are directed towards welfare of mankind. Two incidents from the life of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism depict the purpose of economy. We can take these two sakhis in order to illustrate the Sikh economic structure. Guru Nanak’s father gave him some money and sent him out for the purpose of trade but on the way he met some saintly persons who were hungry. He was moved by seeing the saints facing hunger so he purchased food material from the market and served those saints. In this way, he spent all that he had brought for business. Second time we find that when Guru Nanak was employed at Sultanpur Lodhi, he was appointed in charge of the store and was required to disburse food grains to the ordered parties. While giving the articles to all and sundry, the Guru repeated the word *tera-tera* (means ‘yours’ or all belongs to God).

Both the incidents portray the meaning and purpose of economy. Spending patterns have also been, elaborated in these sakhis. According to it welfare of humankind must be put on priority. Therefore accumulation of wealth is a root cause of many evils. Wealth more than one’s needs is like a serpent that ultimately destroys a person. And without misdeeds it is not amassed and it accompanies not when a man dies. Reasonable money is needed to meet miscellaneous earthly needs. “Guru Nanak and other Gurus do not expect us to live the lives of pampers as Christ and Tolstoy said. Still the revolutionaries should be-aware of un-needed heaps of wealth.” Thus we see that
“The economy as conceived by Guru Nanak is a service economy.” Here development is regarded in terms of creative production of goods and services of this kind. Things are not produced in excess to increase the greed of man. This approach decreases the poverty and service is the ultimate goal of this economy. “In brief this approach is meant to achieve the objective of rendering service to people through which poverty, unemployment, and economic disparities that not only mar the economic growth of society but causes economic injustice in society, will automatically vanish.”

“Generally Human input, production, consumption and distribution, and providing future (to store) are considered basic functions and elements of economic structure.” In this context often quoted words by Guru Nanak offer us a gist of Sikh economy. “He alone, O Nanak, knows the true way who earns with the sweat of his brow and then shares with others.” In original text ghaal implies the ‘productive work’ where as kichh hathon dei denotes the distribution aspect and khai can be understood in the context of consumption patterns. ‘Productive work’ is also called kirat that “is antithesis of the unproductive, uncreative, useless or worthless practices.” Gurdip Kaur Brar classifies the factors of production in four kinds: (I) land (II) labor (III) capital (IV) enterprises.

Land basically can be interpreted in terms of natural resources such as minerals, metals, water etc. In Gurus’ vision land is not the property of a single person. Thus no one has right to own it as one’s natural right but it belongs to God who is the preserver of whole universe. It is a vessel that is full of resources endowed by God. Now it depends on the efforts of man how much he takes out it. Everybody engaged in productive work will be dignified because in the vision of Sikh Gurus labor is not just an output of man’s skills or potential but a divine blessing that is an assistant factor to spiritual progress. On the basis of occupation, no one can be considered low or high. In this way Sikh Gurus highlighted the dignity of labor. Here everybody is free to choose the job. Like Hinduism, professions are not attached with the caste but they are open to all, there exist no demarcation among different vocations. No restrictions are imposed on individual or a particular group of people ‘This freedom of choice or work in the economy of Guru Nanak’s vision will automatically solve the problem of mobility of labor from one occupation to another and from one place to another.’ Exploitation of labor is
prohibited. It has been condemned not only on moral level but it corrupts the exploiter’s mind too.

Capital is not regarded as an instrument of investment, exchange or to fulfill physical needs. It works both negatively and positively. Money, earned by corrupt ways neither accompanies the human soul nor makes him a true being. Ethically speaking if earned sincerely and shared with others, it contributes to the development of personality of a man as well as the society. Entrepreneur not only works for his sole benefit but also shares his profit with fellow beings. Trade, Banking and ownership are also included in the economy of Sikh Guru’s vision but all these dimensions must be based on above mentioned norms.

4.3.6 Concept of Capital

In modern times capitalism and Socialism are two major economic systems which are controlling the capital of the world. Both have caused many changes not only in world economy but even in the human understanding as well. Their influences, in predominant way, can be seen in America and Russia. Human psychology has been affected by these systems to a great extent and inspired by these structures different forms of theories and practices had emerged. Demerits are also found in these systems. Modern history of world has also witnessed the results of conflict between these models. Capitalism and socialism have emphasized the significance of money to determine the human fate. “At present, various view-points prevail which advocate high material standards for human society, and they measure the happiness of man in terms of availability of material comforts. The chief among these are capitalist’s and communist’s view point. The capitalistic view point wholly favors materialistic growth, but this view point is severely criticized on account of the excess importance it gives to profit-maximization and also for laying great emphasis on the acquisition of private property, thus resulting in widening the gap between the rich and the poor.” Socio-cultural-political institutions have been organized according to the paradigms of these systems. Drawback of these models highlighted by scholars is that they have made efforts to create their hegemony on different countries through thought and practice. Capitalism is very hegemonic on the issue of surplus money where as socialism has failed to bring in any
basic change in human behavior except creating a “desire to control the surplus money and production.”

These structures should not be entitled as universal in the true sense of the term. Though they have contributed to human life yet their drawbacks can’t be ignored. Sikh Gurus in their hymns have used the word *punji* (capital) which suggests that they were conscious about the role of money to sustain life or any society. Term *bohitha* (ship), employed in sacred Sikh writings, and symbolizes maritime trade i.e. through sea. Dr. Gurbhatag Singh has outlined the concept of capital according to Sikh religious experience. To conceptualize this, he takes two archetypes that have paved the way for distinctive identity of Sikhs. According to him *waheguru* and ‘revealed structure of Guru Granth sahib’ helps us to realize the nature of capital. *Waheguru* is a sign of variety, love, co-existence and multi-focal society. Structure of Guru Granth also represents wonder of variations. It does not accept linear evolution but ‘रित्रापम’ is (development and committed service) directed simultaneously towards various corners of planet where human beings exist, life is throbbing. Production and distribution of capital based on the concept of profit may favor its controlling class to protect the political interest of dominant class. Therefore to avoid such negative consequences, capital must not be luxury oriented but blissful. Dr. Gurbhatag Singh calls it ‘rapturous capital’. It means money produced with sincere efforts must serve the emotional and spiritual life of human being. Economy based on the theory of justice may bring prosperity but exploitation too and it may ruin the emotional world of man. To establish such *vismadi* systems of production, investment, polity, culture and society, man must be aesthetically enriched. “Only such mind and body will be able to bring a shift into these paradigms. Only such person (*gurmukh*) full of love, service and music, can avoid the market of benefit and competition and would start the process to make others free from this.”

Sikh Gurus also reinterpreted the terms and concepts related with economy such as, capital, trade, bargaining, benefit, merchant etc. This interpretation not only expresses the religious connotations but a possibility of new economic structure too. It has capacity to reshape the prevailing economy. Capital is not instinctive feature of material object but human concerns determine it according to the needs and conditions. “Value was not regarded as an intrinsic quality, but as something dependent upon the mental process of
valuation.” What is true capital? What is benefit? What is investment and how it should be conducted? have been discussed in Gurbani from a distinctive angle. For instance Guru Nanak says that gurmukh should invest in trade according to God’s will; Thus he will be able to secure his capital and to remove fear of loss (messenger of death).

It means investment must be made in respect to the universal will of God according to which variations and varieties of cosmos exist. In other words capital investment should not establish hegemony over others rather it should be subservient. So Sikh Gurus has interpreted capital not in an alienated context, as in modern world, but capital must promote the universal values. Therefore, according to the Sikh point of view, money is not invested for the sake of money. Neither it should create exploiter nor disturb the divine laws of nature. Spiritually oriented capital infuses a new life among masses. Money solely invested with benefit will create disturbance in productive relations and cause the suffering for man. “Capital in both models, capitalism and socialism, is divorced from rapture or wonder. Both are follower of hegemonic tendencies and their space is devoid of sacred.”

4.3.7 Langar: Reflections on the Sikh Economy

It was founded by Guru Nanak and later on developed under his successors as an integral part of Sikh faith. Mostly it is translated as ‘community kitchen’ but Prof. Puran Singh aptly calls it “temple of bread”. He infuses it with religious meanings whereas former implies just social ethics. He further elaborates that, “The Guru’s people and Guru were one home and one family, but it was no utopian idea, as of modern socialism or the democracy of labor; it was the democracy of soul, so gloriously invoked in the temple of the human heart by the genius of the Guru.”

Deg and pangat are correlated concepts to the spirit of langar. Scholars are unanimous that this institution served two-fold purpose of the Sikh Gurus. Firstly, it helped the destitute and infused the feeling of equality and brotherhood in the caste ridden society. It worked more than that by inspiring the sense of responsibility towards society. As it was run by collective efforts, thus service in the langar such as cooking, gathering of fuel wood, grinding of flour, fetching water cultivated the value of dignity of labour whatever type it may be. Second implication is that it promoted the path of
householder because voluntary contribution (*daan*) and cooking are strictly attached with the material and married life. Thus it is clear that *langar* is not related with an individual but with corporate life. Only *sangat* is owner of *langar*, and maintains it in every way. Nobody is treated specially because. “In this system, everyone has the right to contribute, to cook, to serve and to eat the food and to cleanse the utensils used by the *sangat* to take meal.”

In Guru Granth Sahib, *langar* has been termed as an infinite generosity of earth that fosters the living creatures and vegetation. In the *Var of Satta* and *Balwand*, the house of Guru Nanak was known for its delicious food served in the *langar* (ਲੰਗਰ) besides the distribution of *gursabda* or the Name of the Lord (ਗੁਰਸੰਬਦਾ). Thus concept of *langar* has wider connotations in material and spiritual context. The Sikh thought holds the items of food in high esteem and even puts it equal to gods and spiritual nature.

The holy pudding, distributed after the congregational devotion and at the end of all ceremonies of Sikhs, is known as *krah parsad*. Term *parsad* signifies the divine disposition of eatable thing, even it is also called *panchamrit* i.e. nectar made of five ingredients or mixture of five divine elements. In this way, Sikhism sanctifies the food and turns it into a holy sacrament. Sharing of *prasad* is spiritual right of every person. That’s why fasts have been condemned by Sikh Gurus. By giving up food, man suffers the physical pain worthlessly and loses the instructive taste bestowed by nature.

Man has two types of quests one is for material and other is to discover the hidden truth in human soul. Both may have interchangeability but in a very higher state of mind, body and spirit. Generally, we see that attainment of a single end does not mean the satiation of other. “It is a fact that in spite of abundance of worldly materials, and comforts of life, one may not get satisfaction or happiness of the spirit. No doubt material comforts of life do form the essential base of a satisfactory human life, but in the absence of spiritual satisfaction, one may be devoid of a ‘happy life.’” *Langar* stands for free distribution of food for material welfare whereas *langar* of *gursabda* aspires for spiritual welfare without of any discrimination. Harbans Singh rightly claims that “the term *shabad langar* seems to be specially designed in Sikhism to draw a contrast between restricted spiritual approach of the *brahmanical* systems of old Hinduism (Where low
caste *shudras* were not allowed to have spiritual knowledge), and the open feast of Sikh Gurus preaching for providing divine solace to the morally and spiritually wretched human souls.\(^{227}\)

The institution of *langar* was an integral part of Sikh shrines. Mata Khivi, wife of Guru Angad, took keen interest to extend and to manage it. It was Guru Amardas who emphasized the partaking of food as a compulsory injunction of Guru Nanak’s house. It is said that even when Mughal emperor Akbar came to see Guru Amardas at Goindwal, he had to join the *langar* by sitting down along with others, he was so impressed that he offered a large piece of land to run it. Guru Gobind Singh issued the instructions to in charges of *langars* not to refuse food whenever and whosoever comes. Refusing food for needy and poor will invite the curse of God because the mouth of a poor is like the charity box of Guru (*गैब्द गुरु की गोल्ड़म, बूढ़ दी ढैंठ्ढ*). Doing service in *langar* is considered spiritually highly meritorious. In fact all this reflects the significance of manual work i.e. *kirat*. We come across an incident when Guru Gobind Singh refused to have a glass of water from a young boy who was related with a rich family and his hands were so soft that he had never done any manual work. It is also mentioned that once during the period of draught, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, a Sikh ruler, distributed free food grain to public.

The Sikh motto *dana pani guru ka, tehal bhavna sikhan di* embodies the spirit of *langar* and it also reflects the attachment of Sikhs to the institution established by their Gurus. To sum up we can deduce four basic postulates of Sikh economy. These are (I) Principle of individual labor, (II) Material wellbeing of society, (III) Doctrine of social equality and (IV) Doctrine of social service.

### 4.4 Conclusion

We can conclude that existential context of human being is very important factor of Sikh world-view. Development of Sikhs and efforts of Sikh Gurus reflect that they were very conscious about it. Existential context contains society, polity and economy which determine the cultural status of any civilization and religion.

Firstly, Sikh Gurus totally transformed the nature of Indian society. They made efforts to eradicate evils from the social fabric of India (I) overview of Sikh History points out that initiative for the formation of Sikh society was taken during the Guru period from the very point of advent of Guru Nanak, thus construction of Sikh society
was not a by product or by chance happening rather Sikh Gurus consciously prepared texture for Sikh society. (II) Formation of Sikh society was not an idea without theoretical postulates but Sikh Gurus provided a healthy doctrinal basis for it too. Household life and gender equality are basic postulates for it found in the teachings of Sikh Gurus. (III) The very doctrinal seeds were concretized in the form of *sangat*, *gurdwara* and *langar* society. (IV) Creation of the Khalsa and its code of conduct clearly bring out the distinctive nature of Sikh society.

Secondly, political dimension of Sikhism is also significant in this context; though sometime it is misunderstood as an uncontrolled political exposure abandoning spiritual value. But a close study of Sikh history removes the illusion. Political, social, and cultural issues were welcomed by Sikh Gurus but these were restrained by the supremacy of religion and ethics. (I) Freedom, justice and concept of *miri-piri* forms the doctrinal basis for political dimension of Sikh world-view. (II) *Sangat-panth-panj pyaras* are those institutions which were archetypal of Sikh polity and were established by Sikh Gurus themselves. On the later stage *gurmata* and *sarbat khalsa* were also institutional foundations of Sikh polity. These institutions, after Guru Period played a very memorable role to outline directive principles for Sikh polity upto the establishment of Sikh empire. (III) Idea of Sikh state, ruler and their nature are equilibrium of spiritual and temporal attributes. Akal Takhat in front of Harimander symbolizes the very spirit.

Thirdly, economic dimension is also related with existential context. Generally, capital or material pursuit is not paired with religiosity rather both are regarded as opposite ends. (I) but Sikh Gurus exhibit no hesitation dealing with capital or material stuff. *Manji* and *masand* systems and royal *darbar* of Sikh Guru are famous example of it (II) In Sikh world-view, it does not matter whether man possess/follow material inclinations and pursuits. Important thing is utilization of physical facilitations, over indulgence of any type has been strictly prohibited. (III) Accumulation of wealth is not the target or achievement but a means to grow intellectual and emotional sustainability. This attitude of Sikh Gurus is totally opposite to the modern management which celebrates professionalism in which tasks and targets are primary, man is merely a means to achieve the target. (IV) The main objective of economic dimension of Sikh world-view is to evolve service or *seva* oriented business and management. To earn benefit or to
increase income is secondary to seva based commercialism. Thus, in Sikh economy money is subservient to the spiritual, emotional and intellectual faculties of man. (V) In this system charity is not sequential as a part of economic strategy but is simultaneous as a primary task. Even at that time, when you have nothing or you are unable to help others.