



Development of Sikh Institutions in Sikhism

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The holy land of Punjab, the territory of five rivers has, undoubtedly, contributed to a great extent in diversified fields, not only to India but to the world also. About five thousand years ago, the Indus Valley Civilization, India's oldest and marvelous civilization, was born and flourished on this very land. This Civilization is considered as one of world. The Aryans compiled their famous religious scripture

„Rigveda“ on this holy land.¹ The great characters of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata belonged to the Punjab only. The great Mahabharata war was also fought on this land and Lord Krishna delivered his spiritual message i.e. the Gita here.

The world famous Takshshila University and the centre of Gandhara Art was also situated here. This land has the honour of giving birth to great scholars like Kautilya, Charaka and Panini. It was the place where Chandragupta Maurya founded India's first empire. The most important and decisive wars of Indian history were fought here.

Every new religious movement is born out of and shaped by existing faiths, and like-offspring bears likeness to them. Sikhism was born out of a wedlock between Hinduism and Islam after they had known each other for a period of nearly nine hundred years. But once it had taken birth, it began to develop a personality of its own and in due course grew into a faith which had some resemblance to Hinduism, some to Islam, and yet had features which bore no resemblance to either. In order to fully understand Sikhism and its contribution to the religious thought of the world, we have to be acquainted with early Hinduism, its reaction to Muslim invasions, and the compromises it effected in its tenets to meet the challenge of Islam. We also have to

know something of the way Islam developed as it travelled away from its desert home in Arabia and domiciled itself in India. We will then know how the two rival faiths extended the hand of friendship towards each other and evolved rules of good neighborliness in order to be able to live together in peace.²

The followers of *Guru* Nanak came to be known as Sikhs from the Sanskrit. The word is taken from meanings hishya or disciple. Their number began to increase under his successors. Within a century of his death they were found in many cities of the Mughal empire as well as in the villages and towns of the Punjab. For nearly two centuries, however, they remained confined to the Punjab as a result of the political struggle of the Khalsa instituted by *Guru* Gobind Singh at the end of the seventeenth century. Under colonial rule, once again, they began to move out, to other parts of the country and to other continents. This emigration gained greater pace after 1947 when India became independent. The partition of Punjab at the same time concentrated the Sikhs in about a dozen districts of the Indian Punjab. Thus, though it is possible to see a Sikh in every state of the Indian Union and in almost every part of the world, the great majority of the Sikhs reside in the Punjab, their „homeland“.³

The first *Guru* and founder of Sikhism was *Guru* Nanak Dev. He and his nine successor *Guru* Sahiban were residents of Punjab were deeply influenced by their simple and ordinary teachings. Due to fertile land of Punjab its economic prosperity contributed a lot in the development of Sikhism. Punjabis are much powerful economically, therefore after entering into Sikhism, they presented offerings much liberally in the development of the religion.

Fifth *Guru* Sahib of Sikhs *Guru* Arjun Dev ordered each Sikh for *Dasvandh* means to offer one tenth part of his income to *Guru* Sahib for religious propagation. *Guru* Sahib did not use that wealth individually. Instead *Guru* Ka *Langar* was started by that wealth. At Amritsar, Harimandir Sahib was constructed and other holy places of Sikhs were also established by that wealth. According to the need of time, there occurred change in Sikhism, then *Guru* Hargobind Singh and *Guru* Gobind Singh were offered horses and weapons by the Sikhs. Due to climate and geographical position of Punjab, the inhabitants of it and especially the Jathas were very hale, hard-working and powerful. Sikhism also had been adopted mostly by those Jats.

Afterwards, *Guru* Gobind Singh founded *Khalsa* *Panth* and created power and self-confidence among the Sikhs of killing hawks by the sparrows. That is the reason that after *Guru* Gobind Singh the Sikhs encountered atrocities of Mughals and Afghans much courageously and bravely. Though their power in Punjab, they established an independent State under leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

This land gave birth to Sikh *Gurus*. The tenth *Guru*, *Guru* Gobind Singh spent most part of his life in Punjab. The Khalsa was created here. Thousands of Sikhs sacrificed their lives on this land

to end the cruel and brutal rule of the Mughals and the Afghans. By their sheer valour, they infused a new spirit of independence among the people. Maharaja Ranjit Singh founded the first Sikh empire on this land, whose splendor is still remembered by the people. Finally, the Punjabi patriots made the greatest sacrifices to break the chains of slavery of India. Punjab is India in miniature. It is the entrepot of Indian history and culture. Its contribution to the rest of the sub- continent is immeasurable both in terms of quality and content.⁴

Punjab was called Lahore Raj during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Under his rule, its boundaries were stretched till Ladakh in the North, Shikarpur in the South and from the Sutlej in the East to Peshwar in the West. When the British annexed it to the British empire, it was termed as „Punjab Province“. After the Revolt of 1857 A.D., Delhi was also included in Punjab.

Thus, its boundaries got stretched up to Kashmir in the North, to Afghanistan in the North-West, to Jamuna in the East and to Rajasthan in the South. We find all aspects of nature in their full bloom on this land. In the North of Punjab, are situated the great Himalayas with their high snow cold tops. The rivers flowing from the Himalayas add to the beauty and fertility of the Punjab. Its forests are an additional source of beauty. The green fields of Punjab have an enchanting effect. In fact, the interesting beauty of the physical features of the Punjab has inspired the imagination of many great poets. A famous historian writes “No country in the East presents the same variety of features as does the land of five rivers”.

When *Guru* Gobind Singh created the Khalsa, the natives of Punjab embraced Sikhism in large numbers. The Sikhs put up a strong and fearless resistance to the brutalities of the Mughals and the Afghans and laid down their lives for the sake of Sikhism. Finally, they succeeded in establishing an independent Sikh empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

“*Guru* Nanak was a not type of mystic, absorbed in the love of God seeking personal salvation but he was deeply concerned with evils of his times and the fate of human existence in the complexity of orthodox social and religious infrastructure of the society as well as corruption which had effected morality and the stability of the social order too.”⁵

Guru Nanak Dev is counted among the greatest personalities of the world. He was the founder of Sikhism. At the time of his birth in the fifteenth century, there was chaos all around. People had become very superstitious. They were stumbling in the darkness of ignorance. Impiety, falsehood and corruption were rampant everywhere. The people of the upper castes regarded it as a sin even to touch the people belonging to low castes.

Women got such inhumane treatment that it cannot be described in words. People had forgotten the essence of religion and it had been reduced to mere rituals and vain show. The rulers

and the officials had no longer any concern about public welfare and remained busy in merry-making. In such a deplorable state of affairs, *Guru Nanak Dev* showed a path of truthfulness and knowledge to the humanity which had gone astray into the darkness of ignorance. People of every class and religion became his disciples under the influence of his enchanting personality and sweetvoice. Undoubtedly, it was a great achievement of *Guru Nanak Dev*. That is why, he occupies unique place in world history. *Guru Nanak Dev* established new institutions of *Sangat*, *Pangat* and *Guruship*. Men and women of any caste could join the *Sangat*. The *Sangat* used to gather to listen to the teachings of *Guru Nanak Dev*. The *Pangat* means taking food in a queue.⁶

Everybody was entitled to partake *Langar* (common kitchen) without any discrimination of caste or status (high or low). *Guru Nanak Dev* appointed *Guru Angad Dev* as his successor and thus established a new institution of *Guruship*. These institutions proved revolutionary for the Hindu society. The period between 1539 A.D.

and 1581 A.D. had a great significance in the history of the Sikhs. During that period, *Guru Angad Dev*, *Guru Amar Das* and *Guru Ram Das* succeeded *Guruship*. *Guru Angad Dev* did a lot of work for the development of Sikhism. He popularised Gurmukhi script, expanded *Sangat* and *Pangat*, separated Sikhism from the Udasisect, collected hymns of *Guru Nanak Dev*, wrote his own hymns and founded Goindwal. *Guru Amar Das* gave separate and distinct place of pilgrimage (holy place) to Sikh Panth by constructing a Baoli at Goindwal. He further strengthened the two institutions of *Sangat* and *Pangat*.⁷

He prepared the base of *Adi Granth Sahib* by compiling the Bani (hymns) of the first two *Gurus* and by composing his own hymns. He founded the *Manji* system, which contributed a lot for the propagation of Sikhism. By separating Sikhism from the Udasi sect, the *Guru* did a commendable work. Besides these, he provided a new social touch to the society by opposing in strong words many social evils prevalent in the society of his times.

Sikhism succeeded in having its distinct existence due to those helping devotees of *Guru Amar Das*. *Guru Ram Das* further strengthened the basis of Sikhism by laying the foundation of Ramdaspura, effecting reconciliation with Udasis and introducing *Masand* system. *Langar* system was introduced by *Guru Nanak Dev*. *Guru Angad Dev* expanded it. In his time, the *Langar* was managed by his wife Bibi Khivi. All people ate food in *Langar* collectively without any consideration of sex, caste or creed. Money for the *Langar* was given by the Sikhs to *Guru Angad Dev*. This institution strengthened feelings of co-operation and fraternity among the Sikhs.

It also gave a shattering blow to the caste system among the Hindus. The habit of charity was developed by it among the Sikhs. It provided a powerful aid in propaganda work. It helped a lot to make Sikhism popular. The institution of *langar* proved a powerful aid in propaganda work.⁸

Guru Nanak Dev started the institution of *Langar*. *Guru Amar Das* expanded it greatly. *Guru*

Amar Das declared that no visitor could meet him unless he had taken the *Langar*. He gave the injunction, *Pehle Pangat, Pachhe Sangat* (first eat together and then meet together). Mughal Emperor Akbar and the ruler of Haripur had also partaken the *Langar* in the *Pangat* before meeting *Guru Amar Das*. It was open for people of every religion and caste. The *Langar* was served till late at night. The remaining food was thrown to birds and animals. The institution of *Langar* proved much helpful in the propagation of Sikhism. It gave a hattering blow to the caste system and developed a feeling of brotherhood among the Sikhs. The *Guru Ka Langar* was a means of emphasizing unity and equality of mankind.⁹

The establishment of *Manji* system was one of the most important works of *Guru Amar Das*. During his *Guruship*, the number of the followers of Sikhism had increased considerably. Thus, it became impossible for *Guru Amar Das* to reach every Sikh. So, he established twenty two *Manjis* to convey the message of Sikhism living in far off areas. It should be kept in mind that *Guru Amar Das* did not establish all the *Manjis* at one time. Instead, the process continued throughout his *Guruship*. The head of every *Manji* was called *Manjidar*. That post was given only to a very pious Sikh. The area of propaganda of the *Manjidar* was not limited to any specific area. He could visit any place for propaganda at his will. Those *Manjidars* appealed to more and more people to join Sikhism. Moreover, they collected liberal contributions from the Sikhs and sent the same to *Guru Amar Das*. As the *Manjidars* used to sit on *Manji* (the cot) while preaching, the system came to be known as *Manji* system in history. It made tangible contribution to the development and progress of Sikhism.

The institution of *Manji* played a big role in the development of Sikh organization in the Sixteenth century. *Guru Ram Das* had started the digging work of two Sarovars (*Amritsar* and *Santokhsar*) at *Ramdaspora*.¹⁰ He needed money to complete that work. So, he sent his representatives to different places to collect money from the Sikhs and to propagate Sikhism.

This institution later came to be known as *Masand* system. The foundation of *Masand* system proved to be a step of reaching importance. It contributed a lot to the spread of Sikhism in remote places. Besides, the *Masands* succeeded in collecting money required for Sarovars from the Sikhs.

Masand system played a big role in consolidating Sikhism. Development of *Masand* system was one of the greatest achievements of *Guru Arjan Dev*. This system was founded by *Guru Ram Das*. The word *Masand* has been derived from the Persian word *Masnad* which means high place. As the representatives of *Guru* used to sit on a higher place than there's, so they were called as *Masands*. With the passage of time, the number of Sikhs had increased considerably. As a consequence, *Guru* needed money for *Langar* and other development programmes. It was enjoined upon every Sikh to give *Dasvandh* of his total income to *Guru Sahib*. For collecting this money from Sikhs, he appointed very persons called *Masands*.

These *Masands* not only collected money, but also propagated Sikhism with a vigorous zeal.

The money collected by *Masands* was deposited in the *Guru*'s treasury at Amritsar on the occasions of Diwali and Baisakhi. The *Masand* system played a vital role in spreading the message of Sikhism to far-off places.

The defective *Masand* system proved an important factor responsible for the creation of the Khalsa. *Guru Ram Das* had started *Masand* system for the development of Sikhism. With the passage of time, *Masands* forgot their basic ideals, became corrupt and arrogant. Instead of leading the Sikhs, they started looting them. They grew so arrogant that they started defying even the orders of *Guru Sahib*.

They began to say that they were the makers of *Gurus*. Many influential *Masands* had set up their separate Gurgaddis. In that way, they had become big hurdles in the development of Sikhism. In order to get rid of those *Masands*, *Guru Sahib* thought of organizing the Sikhs into a new form. So, a drastic remedy was needed. *Guru Gobind Singh*, the tenth *Guru* of the Sikhs, is an unparalleled hero in the history of world. *Guru Gobind Singh* satiated the forty-two years short span of his life with tremendous activities and achievements of far reaching consequence.

Guru Gobind Singh was one of the greatest personalities, not only of India but also of the world. At the time of his assumption of *Guruship* in 1677, he was hardly 9 years old. At that time, India was ruled by a cruel Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb. He was determined to convert the whole of India to Islam. His iconoclastic fury was at its worst and the Hindus were chafing under the iron heel of repression of the fanatics of Islam. His religious fanaticism was responsible for the martyrdom of *Guru Tegh Bahadur* in 1675 A.D. It was at that critical juncture, that *Guru Gobind Singh* assumed the *Guruship* of the Sikhs. With his appearance, the ray flashed by piercing the enveloping darkness of disaster.¹¹ He was a born leader, a great warrior, a remarkable commander, a builder par excellence, a great social reformer, a great religious leader and a bright luminary on the literary horizon of India.

Thus, *Guru Gobind Singh* played a wide diversity of roles with extraordinary skill and purposefulness. The creation of the Khalsa by *Guru Gobind Singh* was his greatest contribution. By doing so, he galvanized a despirited and politically subdued people in history. Undoubtedly, Sikhism made rapid strides in diversified fields, during the pontificate of *Guru Gobind Singh*. *Sangat* means a congregation of the Sikhs. The *Sangat* gathered in the morning and evening to listen to the Bani of *Guru Angad Dev*. This institution of *Sangat* was established by *Guru Nanak Dev*. *Guru Angad Dev* developed it further. Any man or woman could join *Sangat* without the *Pangat* or *Langar* was established by *Guru Nanak Dev*. *Guru Angad Dev* continued it and *Guru Amar Das* further developed this institution. *Guru Amar Das* declared that none could meet him without taking *Langar*. He gave the slogan of first *Pangat* and *Sangat*. This institution greatly helped in eradicating caste system and untouchability in the society. The history of Sikhism started with *Guru Nanak Dev*, the first *Guru* in

the fifteenth century in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent.

The religious practices were formalised by *Guru Gobind Singh* on 13th April, 1699. The later baptised five persons from different social backgrounds to form *Khalsa*. The first five, Pure Ones, then baptised *Gobind Singh* into the *Khalsa* fold.¹² This gives the order of *Khalsa*, a history of around 300 years.

The history of Sikhism is closely associated with the history of Punjab and the socio-political situation in 16th-century Northwestern Indian subcontinent (modern Pakistan and India).

During the Mughal rule of India, Sikhism was in conflict with the Mughal empire laws, because they were affecting political successions of Mughals while cherishing saints from Hinduism and Islam. Prominent Sikh *Gurus* were killed by Islamic rulers for refusing to convert to Islam,^[3] and for opposing the persecution of Sikhs and Hindus. Of total 10 Sikh *Gurus*, last 6 *Gurus* were persecuted, *Gurus* themselves were tortured and executed (*Guru Arjan* and *Guru Tegh Bahadur*), and close kings of several *Gurus* were brutally killed (such as 6 and 9 years old sons of *Guru Gobind Singh*) along with numerous other main revered figures of Sikhism were tortured and killed (such as *Banda Bahadur*, *Bhai Mati Das*, *Bhai Sati Das* and *Bhai Dayala*), by Islamic rulers for refusing to convert to Islam, and for opposing the persecution of Sikhs and Hindus. Subsequently, Sikhism militarised to oppose Mughal hegemony.¹³ The emergence of the Sikh Confederacy under the *misl*s and Sikh Empire under reign of the Maharaja *Ranjit Singh* was characterised by religious tolerance and pluralism with Christians, Muslims and Hindus in positions of power. The establishment of the Sikh Empire is commonly considered the zenith of Sikhism at political level during that time the Sikh Empire came to include Kashmir, Ladakh, and Peshawar. *Hari Singh Nalwa*, the Commander-in-chief of the Sikh army along the North West Frontier, took the boundary of the Sikh Empire to the very mouth of the Khyber Pass. The Empire's secular administration integrated innovative military, economic and Governmental reforms.

The months leading up to the partition of India in 1947, saw heavy conflict in the Punjab among Sikh and Muslims, which saw the effective religious migration of Punjabi Sikhs and Hindus from West Punjab which mirrored a similar religious migration of Punjabi Muslims in East Punjab.

Guru Nanak Dev and his nine spiritual successors blessed this sacred land of five rivers by their incarnation. The development and growth of Sikhism is very closely related to the geographical features of the Punjab. People of this land were economically rich, so they contributed a lot towards the development of Sikhism. They never hesitated in contributing for the *Langar*, historical buildings and other necessary projects of the Sikh Panth. They always helped the needy and the poor who became the followers of Sikhism. The Jats of Punjab were very brave, fearless and self-respecting. When *Guru Gobind Singh* created the *Khalsa*, they embraced Sikhism in large numbers. The Sikhs put up a strong and fearless resistance to the brutalities of the Mughals and the

Afghans and laid down their lives for the sake of Sikhism. Finally, they succeeded in establishing an independent Sikh empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Sikhism is a way of life or self-discipline coupled with a belief in the unity of God, equality of human beings, faith in the *Guru*'s word and love for everybody. The steppingstone for a Sikh is to accept the existence of God and worship Him and Him alone with his tongue, his mind and his actions. A Sikh puts more trust in God than in his relatives or his possessions and acts in God's name. Gradually he reaches a stage where as the *Guru* says, "Water mingles with water and the light merges with light, discarding their separate existences." According to Sikhism, man's salvation lies not only in his faith but also in his character and his eagerness to do active good. "Life without virtue runs to waste" says *Guru Nanak*. The *Guru* gives practical tips to achieve the goal. Every Sikh is expected to replace lust, anger, greed, pride and undue worldly attachment with their virtuous counterparts, self-control, forgiveness, contentment love of God and humility before going to the next step of doing active good. It is like sweeping the floor. As a rule where broom does not reach, the dust will not vanish off itself. "The new thing will fill the vessel only if the existing one is emptied out," says the *Guru*. The *Guru* compares this step to a wrestling match where one wrestler is to fight with five (i.e. five evils).

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