



# *Masand* System : As a First Administrative Body

**Dr. Baldev Singh Cheema**

Assistant Professor

Department of History,

Guru Gobind Singh Degree College,

Talwandi Sabo, Bathinda (Punjab)

The *Masand* not only collected *Dasvandh* but also preached Sikhism. *Masand* system played a significant role in the evolution of the Sikh movement. *Guru Ram Das* had started the digging work of two sarovars at Ramdaspura. 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 with far-reaching importance. It contributed a lot to the spread of Sikhism in remote places. Besides, the *Masand* succeeded in collecting money required for sarovars from the Sikhs. *Masand* system also played a big role in consolidating Sikhism.<sup>1</sup>

These chief Sikhs appointed by *Guru* had high place. Therefore, they began to be called as *Masands*. In Mughal period, officers were also called as '*Masand Nasheen*'. The meaning of *Masand* is of higher status. That system was started among Sikhs by *Guru Ram Das*. He had started that system mainly due to two causes. The first cause was that he had started work of digging of tanks, for which he needed wealth. Secondly, he wanted to increase religious propagation. In that way, function of *Masands* was to collect offering from Sikhs and to send those to *Guru* and to propagate Sikhism. *Guru Ram Das* had given both those functions to those chiefs. With passage of time, they were called as *Masands*.<sup>2</sup>

The scholars have different views regarding origin of that System. Macauliffe said that this system was started by *Guru Ram Dass* but writer of *Dabisatan-I-Mazahib* has written that *Masand* System was started by *Guru Arjun Dev*. By testing historical events and sources it may be concluded that though *Guru Arjun Dev* might have organized *Masand* System absolutely but that system had been originated by *Guru Ram Das*. Therefore, that argument also goes in favour of him that *Masand* at first were also called as '*Ram Das*'.<sup>3</sup> That name might be if that system was started by *Guru Ram Dass*. Regarding that system, questions arise in mind of students of history that why there was need of that System where as *Manji* system was already into Practice. Had *Manji* System ended?

<sup>1</sup> Surjit Singh Gandhi, *History of Sikh Guru Retold*, Atlantic, Delhi, 2007, pp-321,322.

<sup>2</sup> C.H. Payne, *A Short History of the Sikh*, Thomas Nelson and Sons, London, 1970, p-45.

<sup>3</sup> Madanjit Kaur, *Guru Gobind Singh*, Unistar Book, Chandigarh, 2007, p-252.

That question may be replied after testing historical events that *Manji* system was into practice as before. The chiefs of *Manjis* were doing their functions equally but Sikhism had so much development that it had become difficult for chiefs of *Manjis* to go to all areas. They not even had the time to see *Guru* and to get instructions from him. By keeping these lacks in view, *Guru Ram Dass* had started *Masand* System where *Masands* themselves collected offerings, there it was also their functions of that they should collect offerings from chiefs of *Manji* and to send these to *Guru*. They also communicated new orders of *Guru* to chiefs of *Manji*. *Masand* System has its own significance. *Masand* System contributed a lot in development of Sikhism.<sup>4</sup>

That institution created unity among Sikhs. They were used to be disciplined and emotional unity brought them close to one another. Their that quality created that *Masand* sent wealth to *Guru* at prescribed time, due to which all those difficulties of *Guru* Sahib were ended, which he faced in construction of Santokhsar and Amritsar tanks, It is evident from history that whenever the institution is weakened or drawbacks occurred in it then that institution was disintegrated. *Guru* Sahib knew that firm truth absolutely. He knew that 'Manji System' and *Masand* System might run successfully but as long as chiefs showed selfishness, greed, pride and moral weaknesses then these institutions would end automatically.<sup>5</sup> For fulfilment of that objective, he wrote *Gauri di var*, in which *Guru* had explained his out look. His opponents were made to understand *Guru* is one. By believing in that life would become successful.<sup>6</sup>

With the passage of time, the number of Sikhs had increased considerably. As a consequence, *Guru* needed money for *Langar* and other development programme. It was enjoined upon every Sikh to give *Dasvandh* (10%) of his total income to *Guru* Sahib. For collecting this money from Sikhs, he appointed very responsible persons called *Masands*. Those *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. Secondly, it gave a definite income to *Guru* Sahib. *Masand* system undoubtedly played a significant role in the evolution of the Sikh Movement. For religious propagation, *Guru Arjan Dev* had established *Sangat* or *Manji*. After him, *Guru Amar Dass* due to increase in number of Sikhs, by dividing spiritual empire of Sikhs into 22 parts for religious propagation, had appointed a chief of each part. Function of chief was to collect offerings and to send those to *Guru* and to propagate Sikhism. *Guru Amart Dass* actually started *Masand* System. He had started construction of tanks. Therefore wealth was needed. Secondly due to much increase in number of Sikhs, Chiefs of *Manjis* could not propagate Sikhism. Therefore, he started *Masand* or *Masand* Syatem. *Masands* collected offerings and also did religious propagation in their respective areas. When *Guru Arjan Dev* assumed *Guruship*, he paid special attention towards *Masand* System and he has much contribution and consolidation of that System.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Dalbir Singh Dhillon, *Sikhism Origin and Development*, Atlantic Press, Delhi, 1988, p- 205,207.

<sup>5</sup> Kanwarjit Singh, *Political Philosophy of The Sikh Guru*, Atlantic Press, Delhi, 1989, pp-6.

<sup>6</sup> N. Jayaplan, *History of India*, Atlantic Press, New Delhi, 2007, p-209.

<sup>7</sup> Prithi Pal Singh, *The History of Sikh Guru*, Lotus Press, New Delhi, 2006, pp-59,83.

On one side *Guru Arjan Dev* constructed so significant cities and mansions whereas on the other he was also a successful organizer. In order to collect wealth from his followers and to spend wealth on religious works and to maintain discipline among them, he started *Masand* System.

Earlier, Sikhs of *Guru* offered him whatever they liked. With that *Guru Sahib* had no estimate of about his income. His income was not permanent. Therefore, construction and many other works of *Guru* could remain incomplete. Due to lack of a good system of collecting offerings, many gifts sent as offerings to *Guru* by the Sikhs did not even reach *Guru*. Prithi Chand always teased *Guru*.<sup>8</sup> That's why he also looted wealth coming to *Guru*. Due to that all offerings did not reach *Guru*. Because offering did not reach, therefore it had become difficult to run *Langar*. also It is said that due to lack of wealth once only fried grams had been distributed in *Langar*.<sup>9</sup> attach them to Sikhism. For that work, organization in *Masand* System was compulsory. At first there was much degradation in *Masand* System. Among them many had joined Prithi Chand. However they had become selfish. Therefore organization needed to be reformed. In such type of condition, *Guru* decided that such type of method should be adopted which might attach Sikhs of distant places to the centre and offerings might reach him. Due to above causes, *Guru Arjan Dev* then organized *Masand* System on right foundations in a novel manner. *Guru Arjan Dev* for collection of offerings, had appointed his deputies or representatives, who were called as '*Masands*'. Word *Masand* was from of Persian word *Masnad*, which meant 'status' or rank. Because *Masands* were appointed by *Guru* himself,<sup>10</sup> therefore place of *Masands* was considered very high among Sikhs. *Masands* collected offerings from Sikhs and directly deposited those to *Guru*. The *Masands* could not spend even a single paisa from the offerings. It was order of *Guru* that *Masand*, who would act against his order, his body would become corrupt. Many times, the *Masands* realized that themselves they could not collect *Daswand* from Sikhs living at distant places. Therefore for their help they appointed their servants. They were called as '*Sangatia* or *Masandia* also.<sup>11</sup>

They collected offerings from Sikhs and deposited those to *Masand* and *Masand* sent those offerings to *Guru*. The defective *Masand* system proved an important factor responsible for the creation of the *Khalsa*.<sup>12</sup> *Guru Ram Das* had started *Masand* system for the development of Sikhism. With the passage of time, *Masand* 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 *Guru Sahib*. They began to say that they were the makers of *Gurus*. Many influential *Masand* had set up their separate *Gurgaddis*.<sup>13</sup> In that way they had become big hurdles in the development of Sikhism. In order to get rid of those corrupt *Masands*, *Guru Sahib* thought of organizing the Sikhs into a new form. So drastic remedy was needed. *Masand* system or *Masands* were, in early Sikhism, local community leaders who looked after the religion in their diocese and linked them to their spiritual mentor, the *Guru*. They led Sikhs in the presence of the word of the *Guru* and transmitted to him their

<sup>8</sup> G.S. Chhabra, *The Advanced Study in History of The Punjab*, Sharnjit Press, Delhi, 1960, pp-105,155.

<sup>9</sup> Prithpal Singh Kapura, *The Khalsa*, Publication Bureau Punjabi University, Patiala, 1999, p-46.

<sup>10</sup> G.S. Chhabra, *The Advanced Study in History of Punjab*, Sharnjit Press, Delhi, 1960, p-105,155.

<sup>11</sup> Surinder Singh Johar, *Guru Tegh Bahadur*, Abhinay Press, New Delhi, 1975, p-27.

<sup>12</sup> Sant Singh Sekhon, *A History of Punjabi Literature*, Publication Bureau Punjabi University, Patiala, 1993, p-127.

<sup>13</sup> H.S. Soch, Madanjit Kaur, *Guru Nanak Ideals and Institute*, Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar, 1998, p-219.

offerings, escorting occasionally batches of them to his presence. The first such *Masand* was appointed by *Guru Arjan*. The word *Masand* is from Persian *masnad*, meaning a throne or a cushion to recline. As appropriated in to the Sikh tradition, it further advanced the concept of *Manji* on which to the people *Guru Nanak's* gospel.

This *Manji* system had been introduced by the third *Guru*, *Guru Amar Das*. The new nomenclature arose from the Sikh custom of designating the *Guru* as *Sacha Patshah*, the True King, as opposed to the temporal King. The functionaries, who acted in behalf of the *Guru* in spreading the Sikh teaching served also in collecting, *Dasvandh* and offerings from followers, came to be known as *Masands* in imitation of *Masand* all an imperial title for ranked nobles. *Guru Ram Das* introduced the institution *Masand*. *Guru Arjan Dev* added to it the principle of tenth part of an individual's income payable for the *Guru's Langar* and for other acts of benevolence on behalf of the poor.<sup>14</sup>

The Fifth *Guru Arjan*, in order to meet increasing costs of the *langar*, and the hospice (providing free accommodation to the visitors) and also the heavy costs of construction of the *Amrit Sarover* (pool of nectar) and the *Harimandar Sahib* (the Divine Temple), in *Amritsar*, introduced *Dasvandh* (a semi mandatory requirement) for Sikhs to contribute voluntarily, ten percent of their income for the charitable causes.<sup>15</sup> Occupants of *Manji* were then called *Masand*, and several more *Masand* were appointed at places far and near. The *Masand* system helped in the expansion of the Sikh faith and in knitting together centers established in far flung places. The beginnings of such centers went back to the time of *Guru Nanak* who had traveled extensively preaching his message, his disciples by setting up *Dharamsalas* in different places to meet together in *Sangat* or holy fellowship to recite his hymns to active the *Sangat* from different parts, *Guru Amar Das* had established twenty two *Manjis* with several local groups affiliated to each.<sup>16</sup> *Guru Arjan* further consolidated the system by appointing *Masand* who were invested with greater authority and with varied religious and social function. *Masand* were chosen for their piety and devotion. Besides preaching the Sikh in their areas, they visited the *Guru* at least once a year. They were accompanied on such occasions by groups of Sikhs, from amongst those under their guidance. They carried the offerings from the disciples for the *langar*, with them or community kitchen, for the digging of tanks and for other philanthropic works. To help them in their preaching work, *Masands* had their deputies known as *metis*. The *Masand* who enjoyed the status of the *Guru's* own representatives served to spread the Sikh faith and consolidate the ecclesiastical structure.

<sup>14</sup> Karm Singh Raju, *Guru Gobind Singh*, Sanbun Press New Delhi, 2014, p-83,84.

<sup>15</sup> Rajwant Singh Chilana, *International bibliography of Sikh Studies*, Springer Press, New Delhi, 2005, p-498.

<sup>16</sup> Jagraj Singh, *A Complete Guide to Sikhism*, Unistar Press, New Delhi, 2009, p-222.