



Contribution of Manji System

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A *Manji* is a Sikh religious administrative unit. It was founded by Guru Amar Dass, the third leader of Sikhism. *Manji* refers to each zone of religious administration with an appointed chief called *Sangatias*, with officially appointed representatives known as *Masand*. It has been conceptually similar in its aims to the diocese system in Christianity, and has been similarly important in Sikh missionary activity. The *Manji* or *Manji* System along with the Piri System, were innovative systems established by the third *Guru*, Guru Amar Dass at Goindwal to spread Sikh religion across Punjab and India under a logical and well planned method of administration. Twenty two devoted *Guru* Sikhs all noble, devout men and women were appointed by *Guru* Amar Dass to spread *Guru* Nanak's message and provide spiritual guidance and keep the *Sangat* in touch with *Guru* Nanak's message. Each *Manji* was also responsible for the offerings of each *Sangat*, which they made in token of their reverence to the *Guru*. The Sikhs' offerings were used for *langar*, and after meeting the expenses of the local chapters, the surplus was to be passed on to the *Guru*'s *golak* at Goindwal.¹

Goindwal was becoming a very busy place, with ever increasing number of Sikhs coming to have the *Guru*'s darshan, therefore the *Guru*'s presence had become necessary. *Guru* wanted to allow his disciples to be able to keep their normal routine life, but by doing that he hoped that they could all be taught equally in the discipline of Sikhi. The word *Manji* refers to the low wooden cots on which the Sikh *Sangaria* would sit and teach the Sikh doctrines and principles to their *Sangat* and sing Shabad, followed in chorus by the congregation.²

The establishment of *Manji* system was one of the most important works of *Guru* Amar Dass. During his *Guruship*, the number of the followers of Sikhism had increased considerably. Thus, it became impossible for *Guru* Amar Dass to reach every Sikh. So, he established twenty two *Manji*'s to convey the message of Sikhism living in far off areas. It should be kept in mind that *Guru* Amar Dass did not establish all the *Manjis* at one time. Instead, the process contributed throughout his *Guruship*. The head of every *Manji* was called

¹ D.S. Dhillon, *Sikhs Origin and Development*, Atlantic & Distribution, New Delhi, 1988, p-98,208, 213.

² S.S.Gandhi, *History of Sikh Guru Detold*, Atlantic, New Delhi, 2007, p-332.

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 Dass*. As the *Manjidars* used to sit on *Manji* while preaching, the system came to be known as *Manji* system in history. It made tangible contribution to the development and progress of Sikhism.³

The institution of *Manji* played a big role in the development of Sikh organization in the sixteenth century. During *Guruship* period of *Guru Amar Dass*, number of Sikhs was much increased. Therefore it had become difficult for *Guru Amar Dass* to send news and orders to Sikhs, individually. Apart from that due to his old age it had become difficult for him to go to distant places for propagation. So, there was a need to some institution to keep Sikhs attached by teachings of *Guru Nanak Dev*, thus *Manji* system was developed.

While keeping facility of religious propagation in view, he divided spiritual empire into 22 parts. Those parts were called as '*Manjis*'. In Sikh history these were also called as *Updesh Gaddian*. '*Manjis*' were further divided into *Pirhis*. Functions of Chief of *Manji* were to propagate Sikhism in his area, to communicate orders, thoughts and works of *Guru Sahib* to the Sikhs. Apart from that he collected offerings from Sikhs of that area and sent to *Guru*. Chief of *Manji* represented *Guru* in that area and preached religious sermons to Sikhs.⁴

That System was called as '*Manji System*' because *Guru Amar Dass* preached Sikhs by sitting on cot or bed and people heard his sermons by sitting on ground. *Manji System* has its own special significance in history of Sikhism. That system helped a lot in propagation of Sikhism. The cause of it was that Chief of *Manji* himself led life according to teachings of *Guru* and acted as ideal for people, secondly was propagation, there its organisation was much consolidated also.⁵

Guru's right over his Sikhs was increased. Many historians have expressed these views that *Guru Amar Dass* wanted to establish his own separate political authority contrary to *Mughals*. But that might not be accepted that there was any political objective behind propagation of Sikhism by *Guru Amar Dass*. Yes, it may be said certainly that institution which teaches discipline, truthfulness, firmness and supremacy of morality, may certainly encourage political movement because such type of institutions create awakening among the people. *Guru Amar Dass* saved Sikhism from danger of *Udasis*. In that way, *Guru* told that believers in married life were separate from *Udasis*.⁶

There is no place for renunciation and asceticism in Sikhism. Therefore Sikhs should always avoid *Udasis*. As the result of teachings of *Guru*, influence of asceticism and renunciation was abolished and newly created Sikhism was also saved from being a religious sect of Hinduism. The scholars like *Mohsin Fani*, *Macauliffe* and *Metcalf* etc are of the view that Sikhism had been separated from *Udasis* during *Guruship* period of *Guru Amar Dass*. But some modern historians are of the opinion that Sikhism had been separated from *Udasis* obviously during period of *Guru Arjun Dev*, but first view is more acceptable.

³ Prithi Pal Singh, *The History of Sikh Guru*, Lotus Press, New Delhi, 2006, p-46.

⁴ Kanwarjit Singh, *Political Philosophy of the Sikh Guru*, Atlantic & Distribution, Delhi, 1989, p-4,6.

⁵ Gurnam Singh, *Studies in Sikhism*, Unistar Press, Mohali, 2013, p-26,27.

⁶ J.R. Dass, *Economic Thought of the Sikh Guru*, National Book Organisation, Delhi, 1988, p-137,191.

Guru wanted to allow his disciples to be able to keep their normal routine life, but by doing this he hoped that they could all be taught equally in the discipline of Sikhi. The word *Manji* refers to the low wooden cots on which the Sikh *Sangat* would sit and teach the Sikhi doctrines and principles to their *Sangat* and sing Shabad, followed in chorus by the congregation.⁷

Similarly serving of water, washing of utensils and dishes, and the cleaning of the dining hall, Through *Sangat* and *Pangat* one gets practical lesson of love for human being and hospitality and also a fulfillment of the Sikh's obligation to share his food with others. In order to ensure regular permanent source, grains income for the maintenance of *Sangat* and *Pangat*, many devout Sikhs made adequate provisions. On the occasion of festivals like Baisakhi and Diwali or the birth and death anniversaries, ranging from 20000 to 100000 people attend a single and obtain the required quota of ration and materials. The spirit of cooperation and dedication that prevails on such occasions among the organizers and their associates is truly remarkable. The generosity of the Sikh community in the form of monetary and material contributions can be revealed only by the sense of service displayed by its members.

The highly-placed and the more prosperous Sikhs not only contribute large sum towards meeting the expenses of the *langer*, but also with one another in volunteering for the lowest of the work related to the organizational aspect of the function. The preparation of meals for the multitude attending a *langer* calls for great organizational abilities. Enclosures are constructed in the style of an army camp. The cooking is done on the spot in huge open-air kitchen divided into various sections. The expression of service and a belief in the unrelativity of caste and class distinction is an extension of earliest teachings of the Sikh *Gurus*.⁸

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth master, strengthened such an attitude among the Sikhs and in all rites emphasized the spirit of fellowship and duty. A communication ceremony was specially designed to encourage an outlook of equality among all in the faith. After the Amrit ceremony, all who are baptized in Sikh style, partake of cooking of consecrated flour, purified butter and sugar-known as *Karah Parsaad* and thus set themselves free meaning less restriction between man and man. It is obvious that the *Langer* serves a dual purpose. It is a symbol of Sikh recognition of equality among all people, to whatever caste, creed, color, nationality or religion they may belong. It also helps the Sikhs to put into practice the spirit of social service. It is not unusual to see at the *langer* of Sikhs a millionaire seated next to his own servant in a *Pangat*. Some high caste people having their meal along with a *harijan*, or a landlord sitting along with his workers. Attending to the needs of others among them, there may be his own master. While reciting Gurbani, the hymns of the *Gurus*, in jovial mood and at the same time partaking of food at the same place are common features at a *Guru's langer*.⁹

The spirit of true socialism at a *langer* must be understood and allowed to flourish beyond the socio-religious field to which it has been confined so far. This aspect of Sikhism is laudable and should not be overlooked by the leaders of the Sikh community, who, in politics reveal separatist tendencies. Its needs to be

⁷ Shiv Kumar Gupta, *Creation of The Khalsa*, Publication Bureau Punjabi University, Patiala, 1999, p- 91,103.

⁸ Kashmir Singh, *Law of Religious Institutions Sikh Guru Dvara*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1989, p-111.

⁹ Upenderjit Kaur, *Sikh Religion and Development*, National Book Organisation, Delhi, 1990, p-156.

encouraged by the Sikhs themselves, so that members of their faith prove a guiding example to other communities in India. The differences are forgotten at the langar, where people of all ranks, denomination and political affiliations rub shoulders, the food and Karah Parsaad that is taken to symbolize the acceptance of equality in all spheres.

