

The Sikhs and Their Religion

A Struggle for Democracy

by

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With a Foreword by ELMORE PHILPOTT,
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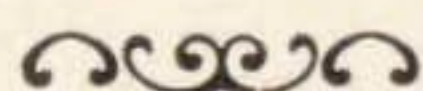
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THE SIKHS AND THEIR RELIGION
A STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY



GURU GOBIND SINGH (1666-1708)
THE TENTH AND THE LAST GURU OF THE SIKHS.

FOREWORD



MY FRIENDS, THE SIKHS

ONE day in the last war my battery had an unforgettable experience. A Sikh cavalry regiment put on a field day for us behind the lines. Their feats of horsemanship left us speechless. I said to myself: "I should like to know those people better".

When I first moved to British Columbia I was struck by the luminous quality in the faces of the elderly Sikh men. It was not till I heard something about the Sikh way of life that I began to understand that it is the reflection of a glow from the spirit within.

So I think it a high honour to write this little forenote to this brief work by my friend, Sadhu Singh Dhami.

Young Dhami has a life story of remarkable interest. Some day I expect his experiences, while working his way through Canadian universities, to find their way into print. Already he is a philosopher of some note in his own right; he has written what John Dewey called the most accurate and descriptive summary of that great American's philosophy. But when I heard him in the popular lecture to a Canadian audience on the life and work of the great Tagore, I said to myself "That young man is a born teacher".

So the following brief text on the Sikhs and their religion, by Dhami, is a confirmation of the estimate I made some years ago. For the born teacher is one not only able to teach, but who selects his students according to their need and ability to absorb what he has to offer.

The Canadian people have a real need better to know their Sikh neighbours, for I am convinced that if enough Canadians know these fine people for what they are, and try to be, good will result.

Canada, for instance, will remove those outrageous discriminations which say that Sikh youths must be conscripted to fight for Canada, but cannot vote in times of peace.

Canadians will use all their moral influence, the power of understanding, to help bring to the Sikhs in India the right to stand beside good peoples of all lands as recognized political equals.

I shall not trespass upon what belongs to the text that follows, except to say this: There is an excellent scientific reason which modern dieticians might ponder for the brilliance of the flashing

Sikh teeth. There is an equally real explanation, I am convinced, for the luminous quality in the faces of those who have long followed the Sikh way of life.

There is nothing good in my religion which has not been strengthened and deepened by reading this work about another way of life.

Here in Canada we have a living symbol which every real Canadian loves—the maple leaf in autumn time. One of our great poets has said, “The scarlet of the maple can move me like a flame”. But actually the maple leaf, sun-treated and frost-tinted, is not plain scarlet. It is a blend of beautiful colours, each distinct in its own sphere, but merging into the other shades without clashing. The different colours help to make the whole not less but infinitely more beautiful, as do the different instruments in the symphony.

This is the sort of world towards which this little book helps move the minds of men. So I feel it an honour to commend it not only to Canadian readers but to western minds everywhere.

ELMORE PHILPOTT,
Vancouver News-Herald.

Vancouver, B. C.,
January 6, 1943.

THE AUTHOR

SADHU SINGH DHAMI is a Sikh scholar from the Punjab, now a Canadian citizen residing in Montreal.

He came to Canada as an immigrant at the age of 15, and since then has travelled extensively in the Orient and on the American continent. He has studied in the most outstanding universities of India, Canada and the United States and was awarded his Ph.D. degree in Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Toronto. His extensive travels and studies have made him deeply intimate with the life and struggles of the East and the West and have eminently qualified him to speak and write on the problems of the Oriental and Occidental peoples.

THE SIKHS AND THEIR RELIGION



A STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY



THE tall, erect figure of the Sikh with a magnificent beard and a gorgeous turban is familiar to everyone who has travelled in the Orient, particularly in the coast towns of the Malay States and China, where he served as a soldier and policeman. Proud and vigorous, the Sikhs are known to the world as stalwart warriors. They have fought not only on the ancient plains of the Punjab, the hub of Asiatic history for centuries, but also in the mountain fastnesses of the North Western Frontier—that perpetual thunder-cloud on the Indian horizon. As legionaries of the British Empire, they have fought in the cold isolation of Tibet, on the torrid plateaus of Somaliland, on the historic sands of Egypt and Iraq and on the gory fields of Flanders and France. They are in the thick of the battle for the Suez and India now.

Who are these Sikhs? What warm blood courses through their veins? What philosophy makes them such formidable foes and worthy allies? What is their religion and code of ethics? How do they differ from the Hindus and the Mohammedans? What is the nature of their loyalty to the British? What part have they played in the history of the past? What role will they play in the days to come? Many such questions arise in our minds as we think of the Sikhs.

The Sikhs number about five million, or a little over one per cent of the total population of India. This microscopic minority, however, contributed no less than eighty thousand men in the last World War—a larger proportion than any other community in the country. Their concentration in the Punjab—the land of the Five Rivers—gives them unique strategic and political significance. For it was here that the decisive battles for the rich prize of Hindustan were fought before the ocean trade routes were opened: with the increasing use of the aeroplane it may yet regain its historic importance. Their cohesion, their aggressive militant outlook on life, their heroic past and the fact that they were the political rulers of the Punjab before the British occupation in the middle of the 19th century, give them importance beyond their number.

Their Nature and Origin

The Sikh springs from the soil; centuries of tumultuous struggle in the Punjab made him as proficient with the sword as with the plough. He is neither impetuous, like the sons of the desert, nor turbulent, like the rugged mountaineers, his neighbours. After the manner of the ploughmen, he is genial in disposition and independent in character. Frugal and faithful, earnest and determined, he is gifted with a spirit undaunted by adversity and with physical vigor to assert himself, all of which makes him fit for deeds requiring unflinching resistance.

The Sikhs recruited their followers without any distinction of caste. Although there is little ethnological certainty in the world, it may be mentioned here that most authorities seem to favour the opinion that a large part of the stock out of which the Sikhs sprang can be traced back to the Scythians who pushed their way into the Punjab from the table-lands of Upper Asia.

The story of the Sikhs is a stirring and heroic chapter in the annals of India. It's a story of blood and battles, chivalry and romance. It's a story of a group of peace-loving and non-violent people in the fifteenth century, driven by religious persecution and political tyranny, to become a community of relentless warriors, a camp of reckless soldiers.

Customs and Traditions

Religion and tradition, moral and physical qualities all combine to make the Sikh such a good fighter. The Gurkhas fight with primitive ferocity, and the Pathan is vindictive. Like the Rajput, however, the Sikh is chivalrous. The example of his *gurus* (spiritual teachers) compels him to side with the victims of aggression; a spirit of forgiveness pervades his powerful physique. He is unyielding in a battle and magnanimous to a fallen foe. Proud and sturdy, the Sikh has been a great horseman and swordsman in the past; he is learning fast the technique of modern mechanized warfare. His history and philosophy, his spartan life and love of adventure, his baptism of the sword, and staunch loyalty to a cause all make him an excellent soldier.

The Sikhs live a simple peasant life. They are puritans; drinking among them is rare and there is positively no smoking. They neither have the "sacred thread" ceremony of the Hindus nor the circumcision of the Mohammedans. Their religious service lacks the elaborate ritual of the Hindus and the austere worship of the Mohammedans. It is simple without being stern; song and music, never used in a mosque, are an essential part of it. The common Sikh greeting is *Sat Siri Akal* (Truth is eternal).

Although the Sikhs are not forbidden to eat meat of any kind

they are not habitual meat eaters and manage to develop excellent physiques on a diet usually vegetarian. It consists of wheat or corn *rotis* (unleavened bread), boiled vegetables, fruits, plenty of butter and curds, milk and whey. Such a simple diet, combined with a healthy outdoor life and a keen interest in sports of all kinds, gives the Sikh a physique and vigor rarely excelled by other people in the East or the West. It is customary among them to refrain from eating beef; mutton and pork are popular dishes if one can afford them.

Like the Hindus, they cremate their dead instead of burying them as the Mohammedans do. In their birth and marriage ceremonies, and in the selection of marital partners, they are closer to the Hindu customs than to the Moslem. Like the Hindus, they marry outside of the families of even distant relatives, a custom not always observed by the Mohammedans. All this has an important bearing on the inter-communal quarrels in India. In the Punjab, the home of the Sikhs, the Mohammedans are in the majority by a slight margin (about 56 per cent), and a small, well organized and aggressive minority such as the Sikhs, more sympathetic to the Hindus than the Mohammedans, can play a decisive role.

The Sikh women enjoy equal rights with men. Their outdoor life, helping their husbands in the fields, makes them healthy and vigorous. Many Sikh women have played a heroic role in the turbulent history of the Sikhs and fought by the side of their brothers and husbands. There is the story of Mai Bhago who led a group of deserters back to battle. — Some Sikhs had the audacity to write a disclaimer and forsook the service of Guru Gobind Singh. When they returned home their women, exasperated by their disgraceful behaviour, refused to let them enter. Under the leadership of a courageous woman, Mai Bhago, all forty went back to the field of Muktsar and died fighting to the last man, and the forty warriors are still remembered in the daily prayers of the Sikhs.

The Background

In the fifteenth century both India and Europe were shaking off the torpor of the ages. England was turning to ancient Greece for light, and Italy was basking in the glory of Columbus and Leonardo da Vinci. Germany's Luther was shaking Christendom and Portugal's Vasco da Gama had just discovered the ocean route to India. The Mohammedans conquered Turkey and Greece, and the victorious arm of Timur the Lame extended from the Ganges to the Hellespont. During the very period when Luther and Calvin were calling Christians back to the pristine purity of their faith, Guru (spiritual guide) Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was preaching a new faith in India.

For three hundred years the Indo-Gangetic plain had witnessed a great conflict between the cultures of the Hindus and the



GURU NANAK (1469-1539), THE FOUNDER OF SIKHISM.

Mohammedan Invaders from the northwest. The Mohammedan culture with its austere monotheism, devoid of colour and ritual, the stern product of the desert, had been reacting upon the multifarious culture of the Hindus, the luxuriant growth of the fertile plains, which revelled in diversity and detail, rising from gross forms of worship to subtle metaphysics. It was a period of synthesis and the philosophy of Nanak reflects the eclectic trend of the time. This is confirmed by the fact that at his death both the Hindus and the Mohammedans vied with each other to perform his obsequies.

Guru Nanak

Nanak (1469-1539) was born in a village near Lahore, in the house of the village accountant, who added the practice of agriculture to his vocation. No angels sang at his birth and no prophecies heralded his coming into the world. Eliminating the major and minor miracles which the simple-minded devotees have spun around his life, it must be mentioned that Nanak was a precocious, reserved and sensitive child inclined to Bhakta (devotion) and early troubled by the deeper problems of life. His formal education was confined to the village school but he learnt much from his wanderings in and outside of India. The devoted Sikhs believe, however, that Guru Nanak was born with complete knowledge revealed to him by Divine forces. Numerous stories are told how, as a boy, he astounded his teachers, both Hindu and Mohammedan, by the fullness of his wisdom, which made them feel that instead of teaching him they had much to learn from him.

Distressed by sham and hypocrisy around him, assailed by doubts, Nanak, like Buddha two thousand years before him, left his wife and children, renounced the world in search of light eternal. He mingled with the *Yogis*, mused over the subtleties of the philosophers, and listened to the booming orations of the preachers. Still seeking, he meditated in silence and communed with nature. But above all, he watched the struggle of his fellow-men in various walks of life, ever striving through sorrow and gladness, sin and suffering, to be good and great. Rich in experience, Nanak discarded asceticism, turned his back on vain metaphysics, returned home to take up the duties of a householder and began to teach his simple, practical, common-sense philosophy.

Nanak's Message

"Seldom comes the poet here", writes Tennyson, "and the critic rarer still". Nanak, however, was both a poet and a critic and was gifted with abundant rustic humour. He declared himself to be a man among men, mortal and sinful like themselves and never claimed for his teaching the merit of direct transcription of the words of God.

At the very time when Luther nailed his famous thesis to the church door at Wittenberg, Nanak was preaching a simple faith in one God, *Nirankar* (formless), All-pervasive and Omniscient, Just and True, before whom all men are equal. He denounced caste, condemned idolatry, ridiculed superstition and pin-pricked the sawdust doll of hypocrisy with wholesome raillery. He attempted to reconcile the Hindus and the Mohammedans by diverting them from quarrelling over their creeds to the living of the good life. Allah and Brahma could be equally pleased, he declared, by loving service to man, their creation.

Religion, to Nanak, was neither verbal prayers nor meaningless ritual; it was a principle woven into the warp and woof of life. It consisted neither in pilgrimage to Mecca nor in ablution in the Ganges; it was love of humanity translated into deeds. Basically, it meant that faith in God and detachment from worldly things should give strength and equanimity for the struggle of life. It meant to strive towards perfection in an imperfect world, till the individual soul becomes one with the Infinite.

Nanak revolted against the philosophers for their arrogant indifference to the every-day problems of life and against the priest-craft for holding the whip of dogma over the mind of man. The philosophers, preferring to operate on some remote edge of things, had banished intelligence from the world of common struggle; the official custodians of religion were rifling the pockets of humanity after having tied its limbs with cords of creed. Nanak brought men to the path of wisdom by personal example.

True Living and Empty Ritual

True living and not empty ritual is the essence of religious life. But the followers of established religions soon degenerate into the smugness of self-seeking comfort and ease out of which their Masters once shook them with their inspiring message. The hard road of truth and self-sacrifice is abandoned for the by-ways of personal gain and egotism. The religious idealism is lost in a barrage of high sounding words and eloquent phrases. They worship the form instead of the spirit, the symbol instead of the essence, and hinder their development by narrow creed and stultifying dogma. Their leaders cease to live their religion; they begin to use it as a means to earn a comfortable living. The established religious hierarchy uses all the tricks of power politics to keep itself in the saddle. Such was the case with the religion of the Hindus and Mohammedans when Nanak was preaching his life-giving, soul-stirring message.

The boy Nanak, for instance, ridiculed the Hindu priest on the occasion of the "Sacred Thread" ceremony, which supposedly admitted the wearer to the position of the twice-born. He wanted to know how a thread, bought for a copper in the market-place, a

thing so easily lost, sullied and worn, could transform human life and bring man closer to God. He maintained that the realization of truth and goodness in the practical life is the only thing that can provide us with a sacred thread of lasting value. "Let mercy be the cotton", he advised, "contentment the thread, purity the knot, and truth the needed twist. Blend these virtues together in thy everyday life".

Similarly, he admonished the Mohammedans to emancipate themselves from bondage to mere form and realize the essence of their religion in daily living. The mechanical observance of certain ways of worship and lip service to high ideals will neither improve matters on earth nor lead the worshipper to paradise. To be a true Mohammedan, he advised, "Make mercy thy mosque. Let faith and sincerity be thy prayer-carpet, and what is just and lawful thy holy book. Let humility be thy circumcision, sweetness of behaviour thy fasting. Let virtuous deeds be thy Ka'aba, truth thy spiritual guide, charity thy creed and prayer, and quiet, unruffled temperament thy rosary".

By showing the narrowing effects of creed and dogma and by demolishing the artificial walls built to divide humanity, Nanak pointed out the basic truth of all religions. Formal worship, if it leaves the heart unmoved and the soul uninspired, is a vain, deceptive show. Spices cannot make the forbidden food permissible, nor the sacred words and pious professions undo the effects of corrupt practices and harmful conduct. What matters most is what we *do* and not what we *profess*.

No Caste—No Priestcraft

Like Buddha and Christ, Nanak stood for a casteless society. All are equal in the eyes of God. High and humble, Brahmin and Pariah, are to be judged by their deeds and not by their birth and possessions. Only he is great and noble whose life is good and true, whose days are fruitful in loving service to humanity. Only he is low and untouchable who lives a lie, exploits his fellowmen and makes up for his shrunken soul by an inflated ego. Caste and creed, like the garments we wear, do not affect our inner self. They are the tricks of the privileged class to retain itself in power.. They are the mental chains devised for the masses by those who wish to enjoy their ill-gotten gains unmolested. Man is to be judged, here and hereafter, by the life he lives and the good or harm he does to his fellowmen.

Nanak ridiculed all sham and humbug, but particularly that which is practiced in the name of religion. At Hardwar, on seeing the Brahmins throwing water to the east for the manes of their ancestors, he began to throw it to the west. When asked to explain his odd, unorthodox behaviour, he replied that he was throwing water to irrigate his field in the Punjab. "How will it reach your

field hundreds of miles away?" they shouted jeeringly. "How will it reach your ancestors in some remote world of unknown location?" Nanak inquired calmly. When he was found at Mecca, sleeping with his feet toward the sacred Ka'aba, the indignant Mullah rebuked him for sleeping with his feet toward God. The Guru told him to turn his feet in the direction in which there is no God.

Nanak maintained that there is no need of a special class of people to intercede between God and man and earn a high commission on the number of souls saved. There is no need of any priestcraft opening up an official agency under Divine prerogative to issue passports to paradise or condemn people to eternal infamy. Everybody can be his own priest and have his own communion with God. So in the Sikh Temple today, anybody can lead a prayer and anybody with the knowledge of the Granth (the Scripture) can take charge of the service.

God and Man

God, according to Nanak, is both immanent and transcendent. He is in the world and yet above it. He pervades the world of nature as well as the world within us. He is everywhere. His relation to the world is that of a singer to the song. If the world perishes, he does not die with it any more than the singer dies with the song. He includes both space and time. Yet he is neither spatial nor temporal. He is infinite Beauty, Goodness, Truth and Bliss.

Man is not Divine as he is, but by right desire, right thought and right action he can be as perfect as God himself. In fact, oneness with God is the goal of a soul's journey through the cycle of births and deaths. Man's salvation, therefore, can neither be purchased through some mediator between God and man, nor is it granted in a fit of generosity by some external power. He attains it through personal effort, assisted by the Guru, who arouses in him a consciousness of his higher needs and sets him on the path of Love, Service and Devotion as a way to salvation.

Neither ritual and ceremonials nor penance and austerities can obtain salvation for us. If daily ablution in the Ganges were the way to salvation then fishes and frogs should have it. If smearing the body with ashes were the way, then donkeys rolling in the dust should have it. If absolute continence were the way, then eunuchs should have it. Salvation lies neither in turning one's back on the world, nor in pilgrimages to shrines and holy places. It lies in remaining serene in a turbulent world, in remaining pure amidst impurities as the lotus flower remains dry on the surface of the water. It lies in living by light in the surrounding darkness and in striving to attain perfection in an imperfect world. It lies in living by wisdom.

Nanak denounced the Yogis and ascetics who left their families in search of God and lived on the labor of others. He declared that God was not to be sought in the listlessness of inaction; He was to be found in the living struggle of men. He was not to be discovered in the darkness of a cave; He walked the highway of humanity in broad daylight. He was not hiding in the dingy corner of a temple; He was with the toilers in the field and with the householders doing their duty. The greatest of all renunciation, Nanak maintained, was not that of worldly belongings; it was the renunciation of base desires and violent passions. What matters most is the renunciation of fear, anger and hate, of covetousness and egotism, falsehood and bigotry, lust and hypocrisy.

The Balanced View of Nanak

Guru Nanak not only looked at life steadily and saw it whole, but also had a vision to see beyond it. Life was not to be distorted; all its phases—bodily, mental and spiritual—were to be developed harmoniously. To him the world was neither a snare of the devil nor a figment of the imagination. It was a place where we build ourselves, realize truth and goodness, and strive to gain perfection. It was real enough but it didn't exhaust all of reality. He wanted his followers to live in the world and for it and yet retain a detached attitude and be above it.

Neither starve your body, nor cripple your soul was the message of Nanak. To torture the body by ascetic practices was as foolish as gross indulgence of the senses. Natural craving for love, life and sustenance was not to be suppressed; it was to be disciplined and elevated. The body is the instrument of the mind, the vehicle of the soul; it must be neither pampered nor despised. It must be strengthened and harnessed for righteousness and service to others. Knowledge must be sought to improve the mind, for ignorance is blind and sinful. But knowledge must be turned into wisdom; it should enable us to discriminate between right and wrong and help our progress towards God. Leaving aside theological quibbles and philosophic subtleties, Nanak offered a religion of practical living.

Reincarnation and Karma

According to the Nankean philosophy, the universe is not capricious; it is bound by the law of cause and effect. Our life, therefore, is neither at the mercy of blind chance nor under the tyranny of whimsical fate. We are responsible for our condition. We shape our destiny, for we reap what we sow. Every thought, word and deed enters into the living chain of causes which make us what we are. This is the law of Karma.

Karma literally means action or deed. Our actions may seem to disappear but their effect remains within us as tendencies and

influence our future behaviour. The law of Karma implies continuity with the past as well as creative freedom in the future. It is neither to be identified with predestination, nor confused with the hedonistic or juridical theory of rewards or punishments. It means that each individual will get a return proportionate to the energy he puts forth. His desire determines his purpose, his purpose determines his action and what action he performs that he procures for himself. This, however, does not mean rigid determinism. There is freedom of choice. The present constraint and previous necessity of our life is limited to the extent that the cards in the game are given us, but we have the choice to play them as we think fit. And choice is the assertion of freedom over necessity; by choosing wisely we pave the way for our own salvation.

Reincarnation carries the principles of evolution and causality beyond the phenomenal existence, for the experience is not of the body; it is of the soul transmitted through the body. Nanak maintained that human conduct, including thought and desire, even if not shown in overt behaviour, will be followed by natural and inevitable results not only in this life but also in the life to come. Death is a transformation and not the end; and we continue from life to life till our limitations disappear, imperfections vanish and we have attained a living vital union with God, blissful oneness with the Infinite.

Thus the principle of Karma and reincarnation makes it impossible for us to blame others for our weaknesses, for we are the masters of our own fate. It places upon man the onus of responsibility for his condition and enables him to shape his future continuously. When you find yourself suffering, therefore, you can blame neither God nor man: you must blame yourself and try to do better.

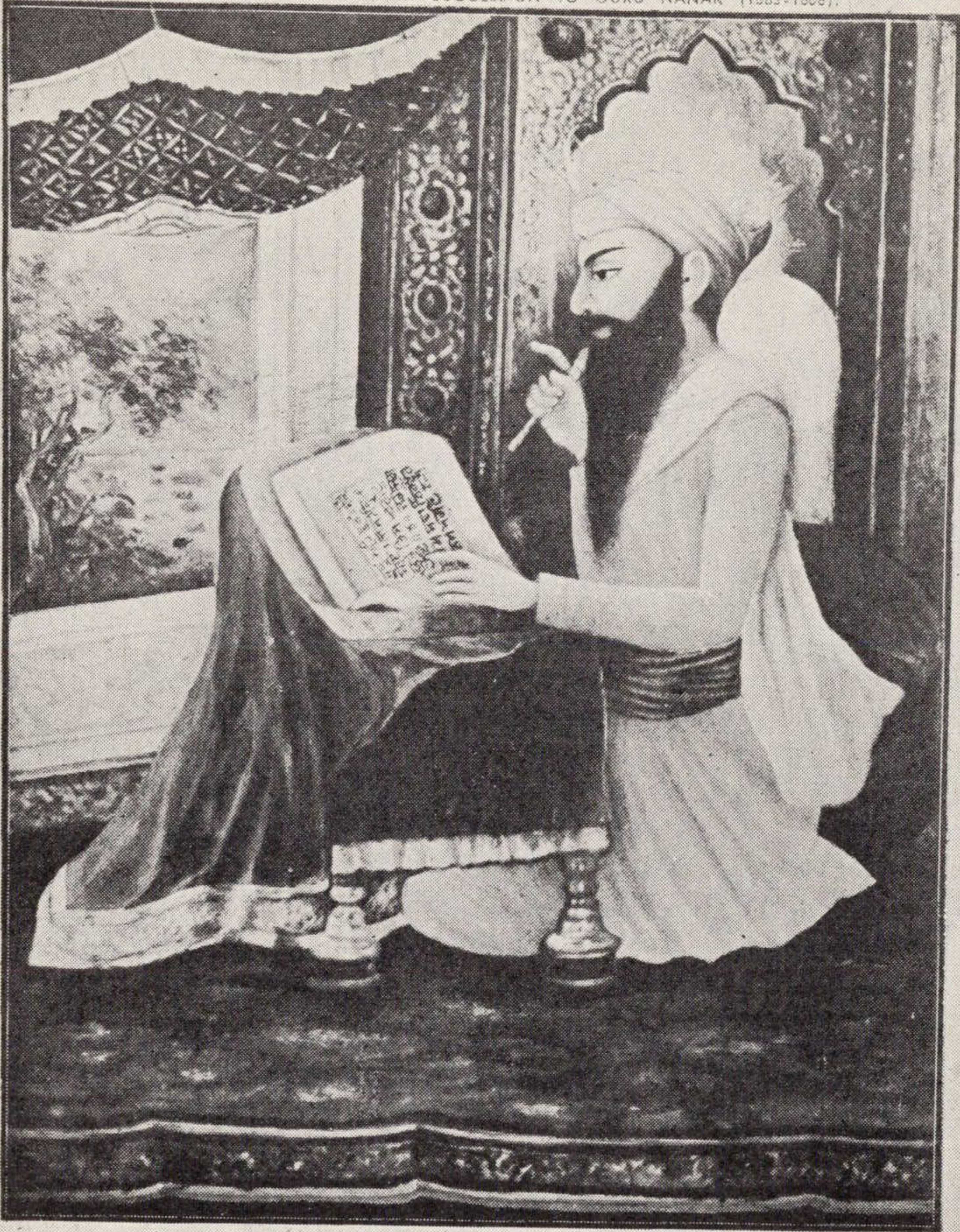
A Practical Philosophy

The philosophy of Nanak gave his followers an intelligent guidance in all walks of life. It is practical, not pedantic; simple, not abstruse. It is serious without being fanatical, and idealistic without being romantic. It is realistic without being narrow, and spiritual without being mysterious. It is all inclusive and embraces every aspect of life. It is a wholesome synthesis of action and devotion (Karma and Bhakta), a reconciliation of the ideal of renunciation and performance of duty as a householder. It stirs the heart, enlightens the mind and inspires the soul.

Nanak stood for a balanced life in which the spiritual, mental and physical development is given its proper place. His own life was a living example of his teaching. It was spent in humble, steadfast service to his fellowmen; it was a constant unwavering devotion to Truth. He was not only a great religious teacher but

“ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰੂ ਹੈ ਬਾਣੀ ਵਿਚ ਬਾਣੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਸਾਰੇ ॥ ਗੁਰੂ ਬਾਣੀ ਕਹੈ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਜਨੁ ਮਾਨੈ ਪਰਤਖਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਿਸਤਾਰੇ” ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਮਹਲਾ ੫

GURU ARJAN DEV (AUTHOR OF GURU GRANTH). READING IT IN RAMSAR TEMPLE.
FIFTH GURU OF THE SIKHS IN SUCCESSION TO GURU NANAK (1563-1606).



ਆਵਹ ਸਿਖ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਹੇ ਪਿਆਰਿਹੇ ਗਾਵਹੁ ਸਚੀ ਬਾਣੀ ॥ ਬਾਣੀ ਤ ਗਾਵਹੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਕੇਰੀ ਬਾਣੀਆਂ ਸਿਰਿ ਬਾ

GURU ARJAN DEV (1563-1606), THE FIFTH GURU OF THE SIKHS, READING
THE GRANTH (THE SIKH SCRIPTURE) IN RAMSAR TEMPLE.

a far-sighted reformer. He organized a brotherhood of God-fearing republicans where all were to live as equals regardless of their birth or caste.

After Nanak

The jovial personality of the gentle Nanak and his simple message, plainly delivered, won him thousands of disciples. For a hundred and seventy years after him, his followers, led by nine Gurus, his transanimate successors, through varying fortunes, continued to grow in number and influence.

The fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, established himself at Amritsar (Nectar Tank) and completed the sacred tank and temple. Since then it has become a rallying point and a sacred city of the Sikhs. He also compiled the Granth, the Holy Book of the Sikhs, into which he incorporated the sayings and psalms of Nanak, his own composition and those of other Gurus, along with selected literary productions of the sages and religious reformers of the period. The Granth is probably the most difficult literary work existing in the world. It includes passages in numerous languages; Sanskrit, Persian, Hindu, Urdu and Punjabi all find their place in it. This no doubt, is the main reason for the general ignorance of its contents and the meagre knowledge of the Sikh religion outside India.

Guru Gobind Singh

The Sikhs, (disciples of Guru Nanak), were transformed into Singhs (the lions) by the tenth and the last Guru, Gobind Singh (1666-1708), who gave them the baptism of the sword and infused them with martial valour to fight against the Mogul oppression. The tolerance of Akbar the Great had given way to the furious bigotry of Aurangzeb, and the pride and pomp of the Peacock Throne was leading fast to its decay and death. To subvert the tyrannical empire, the Sikhs took to steel and to the Nankean injunction "to fight with valour but with no weapon except the word of God", they added "and with the sword of the Lord". Meekness and humility were now laid aside; personal courage became the highest of all virtues and cowardice the basest of all crimes. The pacifists of one time became reckless warriors. The follower of Gobind Singh was to have no fear, though often overcome, for to suffer and die for the new cause was accepted as a privilege.

A unique combination of a prophet and soldier, a poet and scholar, a general and law-giver, Guru Gobind Singh is adored by the Sikhs as an embodiment of wisdom and valour, a symbol of supreme sacrifice for a great cause. He lived and died for religious freedom for all and for the liberation of his people from the Mogul tyranny. He appealed to the basic human passion for Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. To realize this ideal, he sacrificed himself;



GURU NANAK, FIRST GURU OF THE SIKHS.
GOLDEN TEMPLE AT AMRITSAR, BUILT BY GURU ARJAND DEV



GURU GOBIND SINGH PERFORMING THE PAHAL (BAPTISM OF THE SWORD) CEREMONY FOR THE FIRST FIVE DISCIPLES. GURU'S MOTHER INTERCEDES SO THAT THE BAPTISM WHICH WAS TO MAKE THE NEW DISCIPLES (SINGHS) FIERCE AND RELENTLESS ON THE BATTLEFIELD WOULD ALSO MAKE THEM GENIAL AND AMICABLE IN DAILY LIFE.

for the same end his father and his four sons gave their lives. No wonder the Sikhs call him the Prince of Martyrs!

Institution of the Khalsa—The Sikh Commonwealth

Guru Gobind Singh instituted the brotherhood of the Khalsa Panth (The Pure Way), the sacred commonwealth for which a Sikh will dare much and endure much. He introduced *Pahal*, baptism of the sword, which he first gave to the five most resolute disciples and then took it himself from their hands in return. "The Khalsa arose from the Guru and the Guru from the Khalsa", he exclaimed. Thus he placed the Guru and his followers on the same footing of equality and established democracy in the Sikh religion.

Every Sikh, after baptism, must use Singh (the lion) as his second name. The members of the Khalsa were to be ever ready to go through any ordeal for their faith, to make any sacrifice for the emancipation of their fellowmen, and to join a crusade against vested interests. To be distinctive, they were to have five symbols each beginning with a "K"—*Kes*, *Kenga*, *Kachh*, *Kara* and *Kirpan* (long hair, comb, short trousers, iron bangle and a sword). These symbols are not binding for all times; they can be changed or eliminated by the general consent of the Khalsa.

Democracy in the Sikh Religion

The democratic character of the Sikh religion was expressed by the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, who declared that *Sangat*, the public, was higher in dignity and power than the prophets. A leader must guide the public, but the public has the right to check and control the leader for all rights and privileges arise from it. This movement reached its culmination when Guru Gobind Singh instituted the Khalsa and declared that henceforth the Sikh commonwealth was the Guru and the source of all light and power. It needed no heaven-sent teachers and prophets; it was the direct descendent of God. Guru Gobind Singh enjoined upon the Khalsa, whose members, male and female, were to be on equal footing with one another, to act by democratic *Gurmatta* (general councils) in all matters affecting the community. The Sikhs are confirmed democrats for they regard the *Sangat* (the public) higher in dignity and power than any individual, no matter how exalted. Even the powerful Sikh ruler, Ranjit Singh, the Lion of the Punjab, was criticized and rebuked by the *Sangat* for his mistakes.

Thus in Sikhism the public has the power to modify its religious practices. It can change its laws, rites and customs as new circumstances may demand. Every Sikh is to another a *Bhai* (brother). No Sikh must ever subordinate his conscience to any person; nor must he bow before the Divine Right of Kings or Priests. In matters of daily life, the Sikhs are bound by no inviolable authority. If

ਸ਼੍ਰੀਮਤ ਹਰੀ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਲਵਾਹ



GENERAL HARI SINGH, NALWAH (ABOUT 17TH CENTURY)

they stick to certain baptismal vows, it is because of their proven value in keeping them united in their struggle for the realization of their ideals.

The Sikh Humanism

Sikhism maintains that man is not for religion but religion is for man. It sees God reflected not only in nature but also in man, the acme of evolution. Man's life is most important for it enables us to make a conscious and deliberate attempt to realize ourselves and thereby God who is within us. Anything, therefore, that cripples the will of man and hinders his progress is undesirable. The highest flights of fancy are brought back to earth in the end and tested as to how well they improve the condition of man. The Sikh Temple is not merely a place of religious worship but a place where one may discuss all matters, social, economic and political, affecting the community.

Political Solidarity

In short, Guru Gobind Singh gave the Sikh community a firm democratic base, political solidarity and martial valour. He gave it a definite aim, a glorious purpose and a noble example of personal sacrifice for a worthy cause. Under his inspiring leadership, it began the heroic task of liberation with grim determination. Wherever there was a garrison of the Sikhs, there was a protection for the persecuted, a hope for the weak. The Sikh valour became a byword and their sword a flashing instrument of retribution. Under the persistent attacks of the Sikhs and the Mahrattas, the mighty empire of the Moguls began to reel and the glory of the Peacock Throne vanished into the dust of history. Gobind Singh, indeed, paved the way for the future power of the Sikhs when under Ranjit Singh (1798-1839) they ruled over the Punjab.

Impact of the West

Since the impact of the industrial West, hungry for markets, a new factor had come into the political life of India. British Imperialism was rolling up from the Bay of Bengal; it was soon to cut India loose from her ancient mooring. Its far-reaching arm came to blows with the Sikhs in 1845 and after two fierce wars the Punjab became a British possession in 1849. It was a triumph of industrial civilization against feudalism, but the Sikhs were given a generous treatment. Three years later, a Sikh battalion was sent to Burma to help in the extension of the Empire. When the Indian Mutiny broke out in 1857, the Sikhs had not yet forgotten their hostility to the Moguls; they threw in their lot with the British and helped them to add the brightest jewel to the British crown.

Much water has flown down the Five Rivers since then. The adventurous Sikhs have fought the Battle of Britain in many parts

of the globe and helped to police the Empire in the Orient. In small numbers they have emigrated far and wide, and an odd few may be found almost anywhere in the world. Their contact with the outside world widened their mental horizon, resulting in healthy repercussions on their community in the Punjab. They acquired new ideas with alacrity and began to admire the progressive movements for social and political justice in the world. In this respect the Sikhs on the Pacific coast in British Columbia and California have been most influential in carrying home the political, social and educational ideas of the New World.

The Sikhs in Canada

There are about twelve hundred Indian immigrants, mostly Sikhs, now resident in Canada. With few exceptions, they live in British Columbia. They have taken their full share of the work of development of the country. Some farm in the Okanagan and the Fraser Valleys. A few have prospered in the lumber business and run their own mills, but most of them work in the lumber industry or own independent fuel businesses. Many of them have been here since 1906 and earlier. They have worked with zeal and industry second to no other community. No one has ever questioned their loyalty to Canada. They are British subjects to begin with and have a heroic democratic tradition. They come from a community that has fought for the British Empire with unsurpassed valour and loyalty for almost a century all over the globe. Many of them are veterans of the British Army. Yet in British Columbia these few Sikhs are refused the right to vote.

The present position is admittedly unsatisfactory to all parties and the matter has long been under consideration by the competent authorities. It is well known that the Government of India and organized public opinion in the country have in recent years been persistent in the effort to bring about an improvement in the status of Indians abroad. In 1942 a special portfolio of Indians Overseas was created in the Viceroy's Executive Council for dealing with the question and it was assigned to an Indian with a distinguished career in the Legislature. This move is an indication of the importance attached to the subject.

The question is bound to assume added importance at the end of this war, considering the sacrifices borne by all parts of the empire. The Indians have accepted the position that the Dominions are entitled to regulate immigration in their own territories, and that there should be no fresh immigration from India, except such as that allowed by the existing regulations. All that remains to be settled is the question of determining the status of the comparatively few who are already in the country so that they may assume their full share of obligation as citizens in the country of their adoption. The question, so restricted, should be capable of a satis-



factory solution by mutual consultation and adjustment. With this end in view, the East Indians residing in British Columbia have addressed a petition to the different Canadian authorities concerned.

Since the Last War

The Sikhs, like the rest of India, have learned much since the last war. In the Punjab, one out of twenty-eight had mobilized to save democracy for the world. The Kaiser was defeated at last and the Wilsonian sticks ferreted out autocracy from the old burrows of Europe. But the democratic aspirations of the Sikhs and of India, unfortunately for all concerned, were thwarted in an autocratic fashion.

Since then events in the world have been moving incredibly fast. The Sikhs began to assert their democratic rights in the political as well as the economic sphere. They began to eliminate numerous abuses that had crept into their religion. In 1921, they launched a popular reform movement, known as the Akali Movement, against the Mohants (custodians) who had misappropriated the property belonging to the Khalsa. They won this struggle with heart-rending suffering and sacrifice, but without violence. The Sikh Temples, with their money and property, are now controlled by the Khalsa and managed through a committee responsible to it.

Politico-Economic Analysis

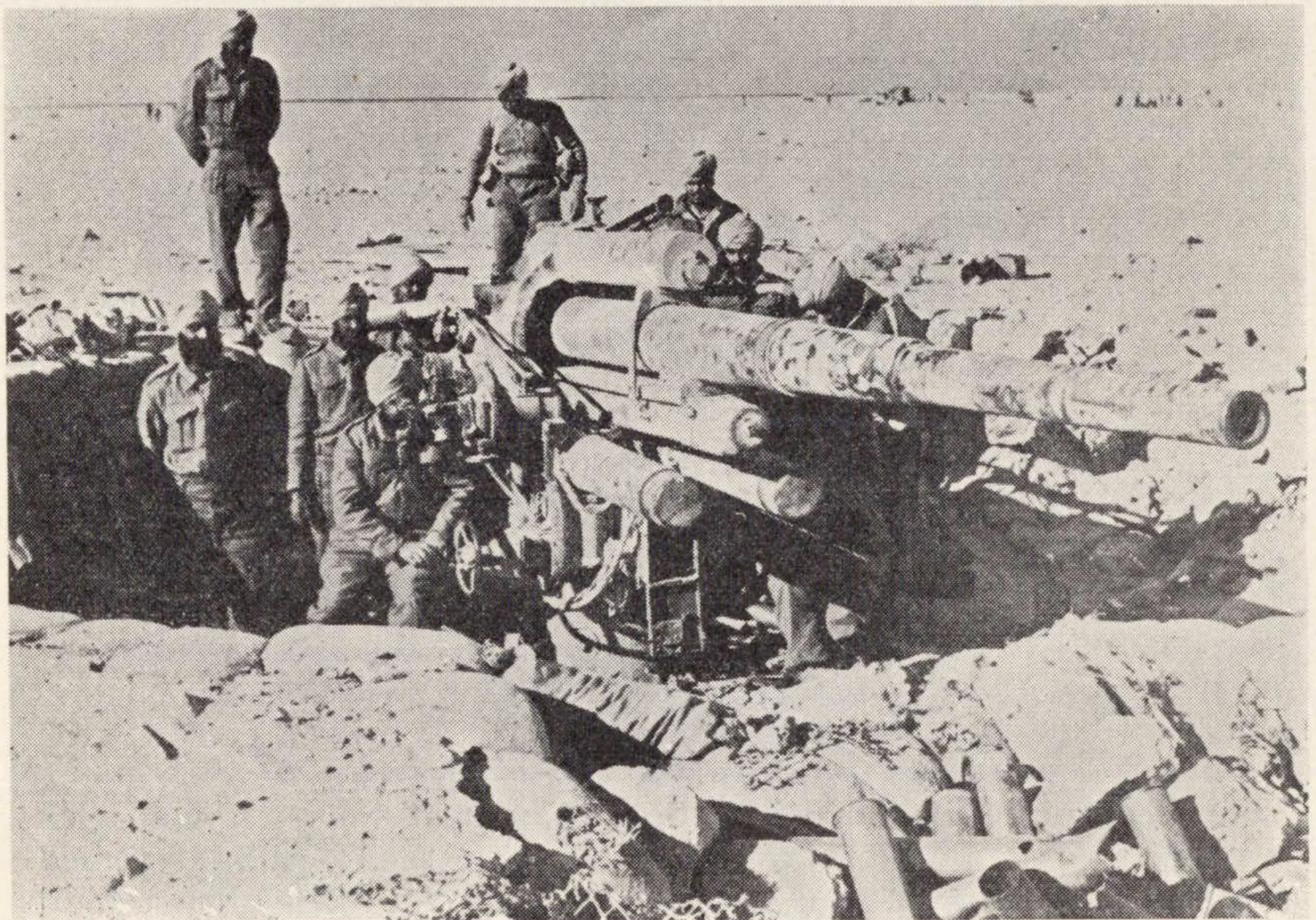
The analysis of the Sikh community gives a miniature picture of India herself. For politico-economic consideration the Sikhs may be divided into three categories. Firstly, there are the Sikh Princes ruling over the States of Patiala, Nabha, Kapurthala, Jind, and Faridkote, all of them in the Punjab. Secondly, there is the landed and military aristocracy; wealthy industrialists among the Sikhs are negligible. Thirdly, there is the large mass of peasant proprietors with small land holdings, earning their living by the plough. The mass of the Sikhs, therefore, are neither factory workers nor landless proletariat; they are independent yeomen. The small Sikh community embraces among its members the whole gamut of political views, ranging from medieval autocracy to militant communism. A large majority of them, however, are ardent nationalists and democrats.

The Sikh princes, naturally, have more in common with the other Indian princes than they have with the Sikh rank and file. They represent the most medieval autocracy in the world today. To believe that they can genuinely fight the battle for Democracy and Freedom is to believe that Nero emancipated the Christians. But who can seriously say that the Sikh princes represent the Khalsa?

The Sikh landed and military aristocracy operates through the Chief Khalsa Diwan, the organization which wields considerable



SIKHS, EVER PROUD FIGHTERS, OPERATING MODERN WAR MACHINES WITH THE SAME DISDAINFUL AND DEADLY PRECISION WITH WHICH THEY HAVE ALWAYS FOUGHT ON BRITAIN'S SIDE.



SIKH SOLDIERS WITH A LARGE GUN CAPTURED BY THEM DURING THE LIBYAN CAMPAIGN.

influence through the Sikh educational institutions and government positions. It is reactionary in politics and talks much about religion; it tries to preserve the *status quo*.

The rank and file of the Sikhs are ardent supporters of Democracy and Freedom at home and abroad. They have taken part in every progressive movement and no Sikh leader, responsible to them, can stand in the way of democracy for India. The Sikh peasants have backed the Indian National Congress for its political demands for India. They were pioneers in organizing the *Kisan* (peasant) committees when the Indian peasants were compelled to safeguard their interests against the falling prices of farm products, debt enslavements, evictions and expropriations that came with the crisis following 1929.

The Sikh Hatred of Fascism

The Sikh is a natural foe of fascism. He is against it by tradition, for he gained his life through the blood of martyrs who died fighting against the Mogul oppression and tyranny. He is against it because of his tradition and circumstances. As a peasant and a worker, he can not but hate fascism which strangles all aspirations of the common man by cracking the whip on his back, by drugging his mind with insidious propaganda and by stifling his soul.

The protest of the Sikhs is not confined merely to words. They fought in Singapore and Hong Kong, Libya and Egypt. Wherever the British are fighting the battle for Democracy, the Sikhs are in the front lines. And they are fighting with their traditional valour and a religious conviction that to retreat from the battlefield out of fear is a thousand times worse than death.

Summary

The Sikhs, about five million in number, spring from a sturdy and vigorous peasant stock in the Punjab. They lead a simple hardy life, love adventure and proudly cherish their martial tradition.

Their religion means much to them. It is a symbol of service and sacrifice. It is an inspiration in time of adversity and a challenge to struggle with courage when odds are all against them. It enables them to accept the joys and sorrows of life as a traveller does the rain and sunshine on the road. It enables them to develop themselves continuously. It helps them to struggle and strive in this world, solve the problems that face them and keep a calm, detached attitude in success as well as failure. It teaches them that a good life is the life of humble service to others, the life which counts no cost in its endeavour to realize a noble ideal.



KIT-LADEN SIKH SOLDIERS LANDING AT SINGAPORE.

The Sikhs have a simple, commonsense and practical philosophy of life that eliminates all extremes. It enables them to take a balanced view of life so that they may participate in the bustle of activity as well as quietude of thought, the serious business of life as well as joy of self-abandonment, the strenuous struggle for existence as well as calm contemplation. It gives proper place to the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of man so that human life may develop harmoniously.

The Sikh religion advocates a belief in One God—All-pervasive, Formless, Just and True—whom different people call by different names. It is without caste or priestcraft and gives equality to all its members, male and female. It maintains that idolatry is superstition, and renunciation of the world a cowardly escape. It is democratic; the followers of the Sikh religion can introduce any reform they think fit and modify it any way they choose. It accepts the principle of evolution, abides by the law of cause and effect, and believes in Karma and reincarnation. Human beings, it maintains, can win salvation only through their own effort—right thought, right desire and right action are the way. And salvation simply means complete unity with God, oneness with the Infinite. The common Sikh greeting is "*Sat Siri Akal*" (God is true).

Sikhism emphasizes *Sewa* (selfless service to humanity), *Sat Sang* (company of the wise), *Bani* (meditation on the attributes of God), *Kurbani* (self-sacrifice) and the conquest of anger and lust, fear and hate, covetousness and egotism. Religion, according to Sikhism, is not a matter of ritual and formal worship; it means the realization of Truth, Beauty and Goodness in our life through personal effort directed by the Guru. It means the realization of God through loving service to humanity.

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