

The Sikh Separatism in Historical Perspective

*Samina Yasmeen**

Abstract

In an attempt to put Sikh separatism in historical perspective, the article gives a detailed background of the origin and development of the Sikh religion, the formation of the Sikh kingdom by Ranjit Singh, and how after Ranjit Singh's death that kingdom was annexed by the British.

The article also shows how separatist tendencies among Sikhs in the Punjab began from 1909 and how this tendency was manifested in the freedom movement in India. In the end the subject of Pakistani Sikh community and the maintenance of its religious places by the government of Pakistan is also touched upon.

The word 'Sikh' is derived from the Pali *sikha* or the Sanskrit *shishya* meaning disciple. The Sikhs are the disciples of their ten *gurus* or teachers beginning with Nanak (1469-1539) and ending with Gobind Singh (1666-1708).¹ They are a religio-political community. Over a period of time, they have laid great emphasis on their identity distinct from that of Hindus. The Sikhs have not only developed a high degree of cultural and sub-national awareness but in order to preserve their heritage and traditions, they have accepted the Punjabi written in Gurumukhi script as their national language. The Sikh scriptures are in Gurumukhi script, and the Sikhs demanded and obtained recognition of that in the conduct of official business in the Indian state of Punjab.

The founder of Sikh religion, Guru Nanak, was born at Talwandi, now called Nankana Shaib in the district of Shakhupura, on 15 April 1469 A.D. His father Mehta Kalu was a record keeper of the same village, and belonged to the Kashatriya family of Bedi sub-caste. Nanak emphasized rapprochement between Hinduism and Islam. He had read divines like Farid, Kabir, as Ramanand and Namdev. Nanak was

* Ms. Samina Yasmeen, lecturer, Department of Pakistan Studies, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

¹ Khushwant Singh, *The History of the Sikhs*, Vol.I (Dehli: Princeton University Press, 1963), p.4.

influenced by the principles which were common to the two religions and on their basis Nanak founded the new religion i.e. Sikhism.

According to the Sikh belief, Nanak received communion with God or Guruship when he was thirty years old.² Nanak's religion was an austere monotheism, which disapproved of idol worship and the Hindu division of society into castes and sub-castes. It was also based on a work-ethic: *kirt karo* (work), *wand chako* (share what you earn with the less fortunate and *naam jhappo* recite the Name of the Lord.). Nanak emphasized the role of the *guru* as the guide of the community (*sangat*), of hymn singing (*keertan*) and of breaking bread together (*guru ka langar*).³

The founder of the Sikh religion borrowed some Hindu features, such as the transmigration of souls, the law of *karma*, and general view of the world. Guru Nanak believed that only really good men would enjoy paradise after death, while those 'Who had no claim to the name of good, but yet were not bad, would undergo another probation, by revisiting the world in the human form; and the bad would animate the bodies of animals, particularly dogs and cats'.⁴ According to him, 'the true one God is also pictured as the timeless indescribable Absolute Lord of the world'.⁵

The religion of Sikhism is beyond all doubts monotheistic.⁶ Nanak rejected untouchability and other distinctions based on caste.⁷ Unlike Hinduism, widows can re-marry and women are given equal rights as men; they can even become priests.⁸ It can be said that the Sikh religion developed out of Hinduism under the influence of Islam. The Sikh religion believes God as *Akal* and as *Wah Guru*. The Sikhs, like the Muslims, object to the worship of images. In their *gurdwaras*, the sacred image is replaced by a large copy of the Sikh scriptures, referred to as

² Dalbir Singh Dhillon, *Sikhism, Origin and Development* (Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1988), p.67.

³ Khushwant Singh, *The Sikhs* (New Delhi: Lustre Press, 1984), p.13.

⁴ H.R Gupta, *History of the Sikhs* (Calcutta, S.N. Sarkar Publisher, 1939), p.38.

⁵ S.H. Mirza, et. al, *The Sikh Question: From Constitutional Demands to Armed Conflict* (Lahore: Centre for South Asian Studies, 1985), p.6.

⁶ Gurbachan Singh, 'Evolution of the Sikh Character', in S. Sarup Singh (ed.), *Birth of Kalsa* (New Dehli: Siddhartha Publications, 1941), p.118.

⁷ *Area Hand Book of India* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print, 1975), p.186-87.

⁸ W. Owen Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi, *The Sikhs: Their Religious Believes and Practices* (London: Sussex Academic Press, 1978), p.7.

Granth Sahib (Lord's Book).⁹ This is a lengthy collection of hymns in Punjabi and Hindi. Again like the Muslims, the Sikhs believe in the complete equality of all members of the faith.¹⁰ They also believe in the fundamental birth, as underlined in all religions and are basically non-sectarian in out look, maintaining a harmony with secular life.¹¹

Examining further the Sikh religious beliefs, we come to know that Guru Nanak knew the Islamic doctrine like life after death and the presence of hell and heaven. He represented the doctrine similar to the Islamic tradition as system in which God by showing a heaven and a hell had in his goodness, held out future reward and punishment to man, whose will he had left free, to invite him to good actions and deter him from bad.¹²

Since Sikhism was born out of Hinduism, the first four *gurus* were Hindus till they became Sikhs. The *Granth Sahib* that Sikhs regard as the 'Living Light' of their *gurus* can be described as the essence of *Vedanta* (mystic philosophy). Nevertheless like other reformist movements Sikhism broke away from its parent Hindu body and evolved its own distinct rites of worship and ritual, its own code of ethics, its separate traditions which cumulatively gave it a distinct religious individuality.¹³

It is well recognized that Sikhs are not Muslim, nor are they claimed by Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Zoroastrains, or any other religious community as their co-religionists, except by a section of Hindus. The Sikh religion is a distinct and separate system of thought, but even then a strong and vociferous section of Hindu opinion is openly carrying on a virulent propaganda to annihilate the Sikhs' separate entity through a policy of absorption.¹⁴ Such a trend is the outcome of a desire to create a Hindustan where there is no other religion but Hinduism and no other language but Hindi.¹⁵ After his death the head of the Sikh

⁹ W.H. Mcleod, *Early Sikh Transcripts* (London: Clarendon Press, 1980), p.58.

¹⁰ *Encyclopedia International*, Grolier Interactive, 1982, pp.480-81.

¹¹ Sachchidananda Bhattacharya, *A Dictionary of Indian History* (New York: Cosmo Publishers, 1967), p.779.

¹² S.H. Mirza, *op.cit.*, p.5-6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.18.

¹⁴ Meher Singh Chaddah, *Are Sikhs a Nation?* (Delhi: Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, 1982), p.218.

¹⁵ S.H. Mirza, *op.cit.*, p.6.

community came to be called the *Guru*. There were ten *gurus* in all whose names and period are given below.¹⁶

S.No	Name	Birth	Guruship	Death
1	Nanak	1469	1499	1539 AD
2	Angad	1504	1539	1552 AD
3	Amar Das	1479	1552	1574 AD
4	Ram Das	1534	1574	1581 AD
5	Arjun	1563	1581	1606 AD
6	Hargobind	1594	1606	1644 AD
7	Har Rai	1630	1644	1661 AD
8	Hari Krishen	1656	1661	1664 AD
9	Tegh Bhadur	1621	1664	1675 AD
10	Gobind Singh	1666	1675	1708 AD

Nanak left a following of people dissenting both from Hinduism and Islam. Nanak's successors molded his followers into a community with its own language and literature, its own religious beliefs and institutions, and its own traditions and conventions.¹⁷ Although Nanak had two sons, he chose a faithful disciple, whom he named Angad, to succeed him. Angad adopted the script used by the money-lenders of the Punjab to compile the writings of his master and gave it the name *Gurmukhi* (from the mouth of the *Guru*).¹⁸ He also set up centres from where the teachings of the founder could be propagated. On his death Angad chose one of his disciples, the aged Amar Das to be the third *Guru*. Amar Das appointed his son-in-law, Ram Das, to be the fourth *Guru*. Ram Das had a large tank dug, which he named *Amritsar* (the pool of nectar) and started raising a town around it.

This town, initially known after him as Ram Das Pura of Chak Ram Das grew into a prosperous city which came to be known, after its pool of immortality, as Amritsar.¹⁹ Ram Das's son Arjun, the fifth *Guru* invited a Muslim saint, Mian Mir of Lahore, to lay the foundation-stone of Harimandir in Chak Ram Das (Amritsar) which subsequently came to be known as 'The Golden Temple'. Arjun took other steps to give the Sikhs the feeling that they were a community distinct from the Hindus

¹⁶ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I (Dehli: Princeton University Press, 1963), p.42.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.52.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.55.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.58.

and the Muslims. He collected the hymns composed by his predecessors and those of the Hindu and Muslim saints and added to them his own compositions. This anthology of sacred writings came to be known as the *Granth Sahib* and became the scripture of the Sikhs. He installed the first copy of the *Granth* in the Harimandir. One of Arjun's compositions show how within hundred years after the death of Nanak, the Sikhs had freed themselves from their connections with the two communities:²⁰

I do not keep the Hindu fast, nor the Muslim Ramazan,
 I serve Him alone who is my refuge.
 I serve the one Master, who is also Allah.
 I have broken with the Hindu and the Muslim.
 I will not worship with the Hindu, nor like the Muslim go to Mecca.
 I shall serve Him and no other.
 I will not pray to idols nor say the Muslim prayer.
 I shall put my heart at the feet of the one Supreme Being.
 For we are neither Hindus nor Mussulmans.²¹

After the death of Arjun Sikhs began to change from a pacifist to a martial people. Arjun's son, Hargobind, who succeeded him as the sixth *Guru*, organized his followers into an army. The final transformation of the Sikhs into a militant sect came with Gobind Singh, the last of the ten *gurus*. Guru Gobind assembled Sikhs at Anadpur. Baptized five of them known as the *Punj Piyaras* or the five beloved members of a fighting fraternity, which he named the *Khalsa* (the pure). He made the five, who came from different Hindu castes, drink *amrit* (nectar) out of a common bowl, having stirred it with a double-edged dagger while hymns were chanted. He gave them a new surname *Singh* (lion) to be attached to their first names. He made them take an oath to observe the five K's' namely, the hair and beard unshorn (*kes*); to carry a comb (*kangha*) in the hair to keep it tidy; to wear a pair of shorts (*kachha*) worn by soldiers at that time: to wear a steel bangle (*kara*) worn on the right wrist as the symbol of poverty and pledge to their *guru*, and always to carry a sabre (*kirpan*) on their person. The *Khalsa* were also enjoined to observe four *rahats* or rules of conduct: not to cut any hair on their body (this was a repetition of the earlier oath); not to eat meat slaughtered in the Muslim fashion (*zabiha*) but only *jhatka* meat of an animal which had been slaughtered outright with one blow; not to smoke or chew tobacco or take alcoholic beverage, and to refrain from carnal knowledge of Muslim women. After baptized the five, Gobind was in his turn baptized by them. At the end of the ceremony they hailed

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.62-83.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.84.

each other with the new greeting ‘*Wah Guruji Ka Khalsa- Wah guruji Ki Fateh*’.²² (The *Khalsa* are the chosen of God, Victory be to God). Guru Gobind Singh gave final form to the Sikh faith. He declared that the institution of guruship had ended with him. He had the hymns of his father incorporated in the *Granth Sahib* and declared that after him the Sikhs were to look upon the sacred book as their guide, as the symbolic representative of all the ten *gurus*. Although he was a prolific writer himself, he did not insert any of his compositions in it. His writings are collectively known as the *Dasam Granth* – (the Book of the Tenth *Guru*) – and though read with respect, are not accorded the same status as the *Granth Sahib*. Thus the creed of the Sikhs as propounded by Nanak and the Gurus remained pacifist but the practice of the *Khalsa* tradition through the stirring message of Guru Gobind’s *Dasam Granth* became martial. Those who did not accept the changes brought about by Guru Gobind Singh began thereafter to be described as *Sahaj Dharai* – those who take time to accept the new faith or those who ‘take it easy’.²³ Millions of Punjabi Hindus and Sindhis, particularly Amils, count themselves as *Sahaj Dhari* Sikhs.

Guru Gobind’s last days were spent in Hyderabad Deccan. Emperor Bahadur Shah who had succeeded Aurangzeb on the throne of Delhi was considered more friendly towards him. In Hyderabad Deccan he met a Hindu hermit called Lachman Das who became his follower. The *Guru* baptized him and gave him a new name, Banda Singh Bahadur. He invested Banda with the leadership of the *Khalsa*. Banda left Hyderabad Deccan, came to Punjab and called Sikhs to arms. Led by him the Sikhs overran the south eastern districts and captured Sirhind (1710). They razed the town to the ground and killed its population alongwith its governor. From there they marched northwards to Ludhiana, Jullundur, Hoshiarpur and Pathankot; then south eastwards to karnal and across the river Jamuna to Sharanpur.

In order to meet the situation, Emperor Bahadur Shah abandoned his battles against the Rajputs and the Marathas and returned to his capital. He issued a decree outlawing the Sikh community. Consequently, the Mughal armies moved into the Punjab from two sides. Banda discreetly retired to the hills. But as soon as Bahadur Shah I and his Governor withdrew, Banda reoccupied most of southern Punjab. Bahadur Shah I was succeeded by Jahandar Shah who ordered the

²² S.H. Mirza, *The Sikh Question* (Lahore: Centre for South Asian Studies, 1985), p.18.

²³ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs-II* (Dehli: Princeton University Press, 1966), p.219.

governors of Lahore and Jammu against the *Khalsa* leader. The Mughals surrounded Banda's forces and starved him to surrender.

For some years after the death of Banda, the authority of the Mughal government was weakened by the revolt of the Jat tribes around Delhi and by the incursions of the Marathas from the south. This was followed by the invasion of Nadir Shah in 1738, which crippled the government in Delhi and reduced it to shambles. Then, between 1748 and 1768, came a series of invasions by Ahmed Shah Abdali. Nadir Shah and Abdali not only dealt mortal blows to the Mughals they also destroyed the power of the Jats and Marathas.

The Sikhs kept out of the way of the invaders but harassed their retreating forces. Their attacks on Abdali's troops became more daring. Three times they occupied the city of Lahore while Abdali was busy elsewhere. Later, they defeated the Afghans near Amritsar and once more occupied southern Punjab. Two years later, the Sikhs faced Abdali in an open combat near their sacred city and forced him to retreat. On Abdali's last invasion of India in 1768, they followed his troop's right up to Peshawar and occupied northern Punjab as well.

One of the reasons for the rapid growth of Sikh power was the emergence of a band of remarkable leaders who built a unique military organization. They divided their forces into several independent commands each with its own sphere of operation. Hence were born the twelve *misls* or militias. Twice a year, on the *Baisakhi* festival in spring and in *Diwali* in autumn there was a general assembly of the *Sarbat Khalsa* at Amritsar where past successes and failures were discussed and future plans made. The Sikhs not only engaged the Mughals and the Afghans in fighting, they also began to consolidate their hold on the outlying districts by building a chain of forts and levying revenues on towns and villages they took under their protection.

The *misls* did not retain their democratic character for long. As soon as the Sikhs dispossessed the Mughals and became landowners themselves, leadership became hereditary. It was left to Ranjit Singh to abolish the *misl* system by absorbing them and forming a powerful and united Sikh kingdom.

Ranjit Singh is the most important figure of the Sikh history and the most venerated warrior. He was an ambitious man with a clever vision. He left his hometown Gujranwala in July 1799, captured Lahore and made it his capital. He assumed the leadership of the *Sarbat Khalsa* and set the seal on his new-won authority by capturing Amritsar in 1802. Gradually, Ranjit Singh extended his domains till the entire region between the Indus and the Sutlej came under his sway. He wanted to go beyond the Sutlej to the Jamuna to bring the remaining Sikh states under

his control but was stopped by the British. Knowing his limitations, Ranjit Singh abandoned his designs to expand eastwards and in 1809 signed a treaty of friendship with them. In 1818 Ranjit Singh captured Multan and the neighbouring districts. In the new year, he annexed the whole of Kashmir to his kingdom. Four years later, the tribes of the frontier rose against the Sikhs. Ranjit's armies decimated the Afghan and Pathan forces and the whole of North-West Frontier Province right up to the Khyber Pass came under his control.

The death of Ranjit Singh in 1839 was virtually the death of the Sikh kingdom. Rival factions sought to put up their own nominees on the throne. Within four years two rulers, and Shjer Singh met violent deaths. In 1842, the last Sikh ruler, the six-year-old Dalip Singh, the youngest son of Ranjit, ascended the throne with his mother, Rani Jindan, as the regent. The British knew that the Sikh kingdom was ready to fall. All it needed was little shaking. Following a series of battles beginning on 10 March 1849, the Sikh armies were forced to lay down arms. A fortnight later, a proclamation was read annexing the Sikh kingdom to the British crown.

The British had been deeply impressed by the fighting qualities of the Sikhs. Although they disbanded the Punjab army, they offered the *Khalsa* soldiers a choice to serve under them. They were assured that all men recruited would retain their hair and beards unshorn as prescribed by their faith. The British confiscated large *jagirs* but handed over the land to peasant proprietors to win the loyalties of the Sikh peasantry. Consequently, the Sikhs joined the British army in large numbers. The period of Sikh-British honeymoon, however, came to an end with World War I. It is estimated that in that war, one third of the British Indian army was composed of the Sikh soldiers. The Sikh also served as policemen in different parts of the British empire, extending from China to the Middle East. Hundreds of Sikh pensioners and their families settled in Canada, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, East Africa and the Middle East.

Since the beginning of Sikh religion, Hindus and Sikhs formed a common bond of unity and fraternity. But with the advent of the British, the process of alienation of Sikhs from the Hindus began and Sikhs started to claim their distinct and separate identity. Reform movements began to re-assert their separatism. One such movement was the 'Singh Sabha movement' which began in 1870 to resist the 'Shuddhi movement' launched by the Arya Samaj. The Arya Samaj claimed Sikhism to be a branch of Hinduism, which the Sikhs resisted. The 'Gurdwara Reform Movement' which came on its heels to remove Hindu priests from Sikh gurdwaras completed the process of alienation

between the Hindus and the Sikhs. The Sikh mobilization led to Sikh institutionalization through organizations such as the Chief Khalsa Diwan, the Ghadar Party, the Akali Dal and Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). The SGPC is the largest and most important non-governmental organization of the Sikh community. It was founded in November 1920 as a committee to manage the affairs of the Gurudwara. The Akali Dal, too, was formed in 1920 as an agitational arm of the SGPC. The Akali Dal though began as a religious reform movement concerned primarily with the Sikh shrines, it soon became the main political organization of the Sikhs in the Punjab.

The separatist tendencies among the Sikhs in the Punjab began from 1909 as an attempt to save the community from the political domination of the Muslims and socio-cultural assimilation by the Hindus. The Government of India Act 1909, had for the first time introduced the principle of election to the legislatures. While the act had granted separate representation and weightage to Muslims in the areas in which they were a minority and also at the centre, similar privileges were not granted to the Sikhs in the Punjab despite the representation of the Chief *Khalsa Diwan* and the recommendation of the Lieutenant Governor.²⁴ It was not until the Montague Chelmsford Report of 1918 that the Sikhs were assured of their due share in legislative assemblies and other appointments in the Punjab. The report emphasized that the Sikhs were a distinct and important community of the province who supplied a gallant and valuable element to the Indian Army but they were a minority everywhere and were virtually unrepresented. 'To the Sikhs therefore, and to them alone' the report emphasized, 'We propose to extend the system already adopted in the case of Muhamadans'.²⁵ However, the Government of India Act 1919 did not give the Sikhs the 33 per cent weightage that they had expected as a reward for their services and the economic importance of the Punjab. In fact it gave them less seats in the Punjab than it gave to the Muslims in provinces in which they (the Muslims) were a minority.

The next important landmark in the Indian history was the Nehru Report of 1928. The report recommended the abolition of separate electorates altogether. However, as a concession to Muslims it agreed to the reservation of seats for them at the centre and in the provinces in which they were a minority. The non-Muslims of the North-West Frontier Province were also extended this concession. But the Sikhs were

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.221.

²⁵ No. 386, March 27, 1942, Nicholas Mansergh (ed.), *Transfer of Power-I* (London), 1970, p.496.

ignored completely. Therefore the Sikh leaders denounced the Nehru Report as the destroyer of Sikh rights and rejected it. Some measures of satisfaction came from the Simon Commission report of May 1930 when it gave a certain measure of re-assurance to the Sikhs. It considered unfair that only Muslims should retain weightage in the six provinces in face of Hindu and Sikh opposition, which had led to a definite Muslim majority in the Punjab and Bengal. And much more than this was the fact that it was unalterable by any appeal to the electorate. To deliberate on the recommendations of the Simon Commission, the First Round Table Conference was held in London in 1930 but no agreement could be reached on the communal representation among the Indian delegates. Therefore, the British Prime Minister took upon himself to adjudicate the issue. On 16 April 1932, he announced the Communal Award, which retained the separate electorates but recommended the following percentage for the Punjab legislature.

	<u>Reservation of Seats</u>		<u>Percentage</u>
a.	General (Hindu)	43+1 (women)	27.42 %
b.	Muslims	86+2 (women)	51.42 %
c.	Sikhs	32+1 (women)	18.85 %

The Sikhs, however, were not satisfied with the communal arrangement in the Punjab and decided to agitate for a solution that would give them more representation. In 1937, the Akali Dal contested the elections as a separate political group. But in order to obtain better results, it aligned itself more closely with the Congress. In March 1940, when the Muslim League came out with the 'Pakistan Resolution' on the basis of two-nation theory, the Akalis began to look forward to some political arrangement with the Congress. This was largely because the Pakistan demand had begun to gain adherents rapidly among the Muslims, thus, the Akalis found the Congress more receptive to their line of thinking. But the communal tangle was nowhere near a solution. To overcome this political crisis, in 1942, the British government dispatched the Cripps Mission to India. But despite their best efforts, the mission did not succeed mainly because the parties concerned – the British government, the Congress and the Muslim League adopted very rigid postures. However, the Cripps proposals did concede for the first time, though only indirectly, the principle of Pakistan. For negotiations with the mission, Master Tara Singh, Baldev Singh, Sir Jogendra Singh and Ujjal Singh represented the Sikh community. The Sikh spokesmen criticized the proposal that had conceded the idea of Pakistan. In their note they stated that the cause of Sikh community had been lamentably

betrayed 'by the provision for separation of provinces and the constitution of Pakistan'.²⁶ The Sikh representatives demanded that the Punjab be designated as the Azad Punjab. In essence the Azad Punjab scheme envisaged a new Punjab state after re-demarcation of the boundaries by detaching the Muslim majority districts from the Punjab with a view to creating a new province of 'Azad Punjab' where the majority of the Sikh population would be consolidated. In the Azad Punjab no religious community would have a majority and the Sikhs would be in a position to balance the two main communities i.e. the Muslims and the Hindus. The Sikhs were populated mostly in the central districts of the Punjab, but in no one district they were in a majority. In the central districts all three main communities were equally divided. The scheme of the Azad Punjab was further elaborated by the Akali Dal at its meeting in June 1943 under the chairmanship of Master Tara Singh and it was decided that the boundaries would be fixed after taking into consideration the population, property, land revenue and historical traditions of each community. If demarcations were effected on the same principles, the Azad Punjab was to comprise Ambala, Jallundar and Lahore divisions and out of the Multan divisions Lyalpur districts, some portions of Montgomery and Multan districts.²⁷

The Akali demand for the Azad Punjab was opposed by the 'nationalist' Sikhs and by the leaders of Hindu community and Hindu press. At several conferences in 1943, Baba Kharak Singh and other veteran Sikh leaders criticized the demand for the Azad Punjab and asked the Sikh community to support the Congress.²⁸ In one of the resolutions the Akali Dal condemned the Hindu press of the Punjab, the Hindu community as a whole and the *Arya Samajists* in particular. On 10 July 1944, the veteran Congress leader, C. Raj Gopalachari, published his famous formula by which a commission was to be appointed at the end of the war for demarcating contiguous districts in the north-west and east of the India where the Muslim population was in the absolute majority. The Raj Gopalachari formula created apprehensions among the Sikhs to the effect that the Punjab would be divided into Muslim majority and Hindu majority districts. This would, they thought, divide the Sikh community into two parts. The Akali Dal, therefore, strongly opposed the acceptance of such formula, which would divide the Sikh community. The fifth session of the All Akali conference, held at Lahore in October 1944, is an important landmark in the Congress-Akali

²⁶ The Indian Annual Register-I, 1943, p.289.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.295.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

relations. Speaking at the conference, Master Tara Singh warned that there were two threats to the Sikh identity – the communists on the one hand and Gandhi and Jinnah on the other. He struck a note of caution to his community and warned about the danger of impending storms against it.

The Akali leaders, dissatisfied with the Congress and the League, raised the matter of the ‘Sikh Homeland’ in case Pakistan emerged as an independent state. They favoured a united India with certain safeguards for the Punjab. They also insisted on the creation of a separate Sikh state if Pakistan was conceded. A major development took place on 24 March 1946 when the Cabinet Mission recognized the Sikh community as the third important community in India. However, to the chagrin of the Sikh leaders it took no notice of the Azad Punjab proposal. To protest against this a joint meeting of Sikh political parties was held on 10 June 1946 at Amritsar. A ‘Council of Action’ was set up with Narinjan Singh Gill at its head. Appealing to the Sikhs to stand united, Master Tara Singh asked them to prepare themselves to die in the struggle ahead. The conference condemned the Cabinet Mission proposals and authorized the ‘Council of Action’ to give a tough fight to the British government. The Akali Dal, it was said would enter into negotiations with other political parties before launching any agitation. Master Tara Singh announced that the parties concerned were the Congress and the Muslim League.

Meanwhile, the Congress accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan though with some reservations. Akali Dal also accepted the plan on the persuasion of the Congress working committee, but added a note that it was unjust to the Sikhs. Jawaher Lal Nehru went to the extent of assuring the Sikhs that he would have no objection if they had a separate state in northern India. Further, when Interim Government was announced, Nehru kept Baldev Singh at his side as the representative of the Akali Dal. In early 1947, Lord Louis Mountbatten came to India as the new Viceroy to find some solution of the Indian crisis especially when the Cabinet Mission Plan had proved unworkable. After several months of negotiations with the Indian leaders, Lord Mountbatten, in June 1947, was able to get them to agree on a plan for the partition of India. The two new dominions India and Pakistan were to come into being in August 1947 on the basis of Hindu and Muslim majorities. The Akali Dal, however, failed to secure a separate dominion for the Sikhs. Their dreams for an independent Sikh state within the commonwealth were dashed to the ground. The viceroy was not prepared to negotiate on this point. The Akali Dal was dismayed but eventually it reconciled itself to the partition of the Punjab. It now shifted its attention to the actual

demarcation of boundaries so that the majority of the Sikh would fall on their side of the Punjab. Even at this late stage, the Akali Dal, having agreed to the Mountbatten Plan, intermittently kept on demanding a separate Sikh state. An all parties Sikhs conference passed a resolution stating that the Sikhs would not accept a boundary which did not preserve the solidarity and integrity of the community. The 32 Sikhs legislators submitted a memorandum to the Punjab Boundary Commission demanding a dividing line along the Chenab River which would, with some modifications, keep over ninety percent of the Sikhs in a compact unit in Eastern Punjab. But in spite of their efforts, the final demarcation of the boundaries cut the Sikh community into two halves, one in India and other in Pakistan. The Akali Dal thus failed to obtain a satisfactory solution to their political demands. Their natural inclination, therefore, was to work for the establishment of the cultural unity of the Sikh community.

Following the large scale migration of Sikhs in 1947 from western Punjab in Pakistan to eastern Punjab in India, about 2000 families of Sikhs were left behind in Pakistan, which are now mainly concentrated in Peshawar, Nankana Sahib and Lahore. However, Sikh diaspora spread all over the world seek panacea and meditation by visiting their *gurdwaras* and religious places associated with the founder of Sikh religion, Baba Guru Nanak, and his disciples in Pakistan. Presently, The Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, a Sikh religious organization in Pakistan is entrusted with the maintenance of Sikh religious institutions, places of worships (*gurdwara*) and the well-being of the Pakistani Sikh community. The archeological department of Pakistan listed as many as 130 Sikh *gurdwaras*. Historic background and role of Pakistani government in maintaining some of these important *gurdwaras* is given in succeeding paragraphs.



Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib: This is the place where Guru Nanak Dev Jee (The founder Guru of Sikh religion) was born on 15 April 1469. The present building was constructed at his birth place in 1819-20. The old gate and boundary wall had developed cracks, the floors were broken every where, the holy *talaab* was full of mud with big

cracks in the steps, the latrines were old pan types and the *yatrees* had to pass through the filthy access.

In 1999, on the request of Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC), Government of Pakistan released Rs.60 million for the renovation / re-constructional work, which involved complete replacement of the old floors with marble/ stuff tiling including landscaping, installation of fountains, and reconstruction of Langar Hall and new residential complex for *yatrees* with modern toilets / bathrooms. The Gurdwara Janam Asthan now wears a magnificent look.



Gurdwara Panja Sahib, Hassanabdal: Guru Nanak Dev Jee while returning from Mecca after performing Haj had broken his journey for a few days at Hassanabdal, where he had asked one of his disciples to fetch water from the spring on the nearby hill top. The water was, not however, given to the disciple; there upon, on Guru Nanak Dev Jee's prayer the spring abandoned its original course and started flowing from the spot where Guru Jee himself was sitting. Guru Jee also stopped a big rock rolling downwards toward him with his palm, which left an impression on the rock. It became an object of great reverence for his followers, who started calling it as *Panja Sahib*. Subsequently a *gurdwara* was built here by Hari Singh Nalwa. The spring water passing through the *gurdwara* is considered as sacred water. The building has been completely renovated by Government of Pakistan with construction of new residential blocks and toilets for the *yatrees*.

Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, Kartarpur, Narowal: This is the historical place where Guru Nanak Dev Jee departed from the world on 22 September 1539. The shrine is located on the western bank of the river Ravi. The building was built by Sardar Bhopinder Singh, the Maharaja of Patiala. During 1947 while it was still under construction the partition took place and the work was stopped. However, in 1999, immediately after its establishment, the PSGPC took steps to complete its renovation and reconstruction including new minarets for which Government of Pakistan and expatriate Sikhs provided the funds.

Gurdwara Dera Sahib, Lahore: This Gurdwara is situated near Lahore fort and adjacent to Badshahi Mosque. This is the place where Guru Arjun Dev Jee was martyred in the Ravi River while facing the torture inflicted by Chandu Mai. At the site where Guru Arjun Dev Jee was martyred, a *tharra* (platform) was built by Guru Hargobind Jee, when he visited Lahore for *yatra* of *guru asthans*. Later on, Maharaja Ranjeet Singh constructed the building of the Gurdwara 'Dera Sahib' at this place. Recently, the *gurdwara* building has been repaired and renovated. A double storey new toilet block (separate for ladies and gents) has been constructed for the visiting *yatrees*. Landscaping including tuff tilling works have been carried out in the premises of the said *gurdwara*. Apart from the said works a new grand *Darshan Deorhi* (main gate) has also been constructed, after spending millions of rupees.

Gurdwara Sacha Sauda, Farooqabad (Old Churkaana): In order to engage Guru Nanak Dev Jee in worldly affairs, his father gave him 20 rupees to purchase profitable merchandise. Guru Nanak Jee along with Bhai Mardana set out to do business. While passing near Churkana they met some starving mystics. Guru Nanak Sahib purchased edibles with the 20 rupees and distributed the same amongst the mystics. When his father came to know about it, he became very annoyed. Guru Nanak Jee told him that he had entered into a true deal, '*sucha sauda*'. Gurdwara Sucha Sauda was built at this site, where Guru Nanak Jee had fed the mystics. The Government of Pakistan and PSGPC, after spending millions of rupees, has now completely renovated and repaired with fresh landscaping of its premises. It is a treat to watch for the *yatrees* now.



Gurdawara Beri Sahib: Also called as Baba Beri or Baba Bair, it is situated in Sialkot, Pakistan. It was the place where Baba Guru Nanak stayed and met Hazrat Hamza Ghaus - a famous saint of Sialkot. The *bair* tree under which Guru Nanak had stayed is still present. The *gurdawara* was built by Natha Singh. A big well was also constructed by him inside this *gurdawara* and many Persian wheels worked in it. A beautiful tank was also there. It also includes a garden, a pool and residential rooms. The *gurdawara* was damaged in the wake of the Babari Masjid dispute. There used to be a very high temple which was razed to ground when it was demolished by an unruly mob. The *gurdawara* is in urgent need of repairs.

Gurdwara Rorri Sahib, Eminabad (Gujranwala): It is located near Eminabad town, District Gujranwala. Guru Nanak Dev Ji, during his stay at this place had made his bed on a platform of *rorri* (pebbles). Later, this became a place of veneration and a *gurdawara* was built here. This famous *gurdawara* was in a state of complete neglect; the structure had collapsed, the holy pond was full of debris, the roof cracked and the floors were non-existent. All have been completely rebuilt with orchards, flower beds and lush green lawns with beach umbrellas and relaxing benches. Tube-well has been installed to activate the pond, which has been completely renovated. The steps leading to the pond have been tiled. The PSGPC / Government of Pakistan have spent 15 million rupees on these works.

Gurdwara Bhai Joga Singh, Peshawar: This *gurdawara* is situated in Jogan Shah locality of Peshawar. It was built by Bhai Joga Singh of Peshawar. During the last 60 years *gurdawara* was in a neglected state and SGPC had paid no heed towards its maintenance. The foundations on one side of the *gurdawara* had sunk or structural cracks in the walls, roof and gallery. The Government of Pakistan and PSGPC have completely reconstructed and renovated the *gurdawara*. Its interior has

also been beautifully renovated with a false ceiling and carpets have been laid.

The emergence of the Sikh community within Pakistan: After the creation of Pakistan, the Sikh community's rights were diminished. Recently the Sikh community within Pakistan has been making every effort possible to progress in Pakistan. For example Harcharan Singh became the first Sikh to join the Pakistan army. For the first time in the history of Pakistan a Sikh has been selected into Pakistan's army. Before him no Hindu or Sikh community member was ever enrolled in the army, but there are reports which states that the Pakistani Christians have served the army and some have even reached high ranks. Members of the tiny Parsi community also have some representation in the armed forces. First time in the history of Pakistan, as well as in the history of Lahore, a Sikh person has been appointed as traffic sub inspector. In yet another contribution to the Pakistani Sikh community, Pakistan government enacted the Sikh Anand Marriage Act, in November 2007. This Sikh marriage act allows not only the Sikhs in Pakistan, but also Sikhs living in anywhere in the world to register in Pakistan with the Sikh Marriage Act. Government of Pakistan also plans to set up the Gurdwara Panja Sahib International University at Hasanabdal to promote interfaith peace and harmony.

Sikhs have in general maintained a low profile within the monolithic population of Pakistan. Pakistan, as a constitutionally Islamic state, has had inconsistent and sometimes intolerant relations with its minorities. Until 2002, Pakistan held a system of separate electorates for all its national legislative assemblies, with only a handful of parliamentary seats reserved for minority members. Minorities were legally only permitted to vote for designated minority candidates in general elections. President General Pervez Musharraf during his regime has professed an agenda of equality for minorities and promotion and protection of minority rights; however, the implementation of corrective measures has been slow.

The historical and holy sites of Sikhs are maintained by a Pakistani governmental body, the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, which is responsible for their upkeep and preservation. Nonetheless, many Sikh shrines have fallen into disrepair since 1947, as the Sikh population and its corresponding manpower, economic power and political influence is minuscule compared to that of the pre-1947 community.

Many Pakistani Sikhs immigrated to the United Kingdom and Canada; there is a growing Pakistani Sikh community in Dubai; in the

United Kingdom there are approximately 40,000 Pakistani Sikhs, in Canada around 18,000.

Though relations between Muslim and Sikhs have varied due to historical factors and legacy of partition but with the gradual improvement in Pakistan India relations and liberal policy of Pakistani government to ease visa restrictions on Sikhs to visit their holy places has given impetus to the rising rapprochement between two communities not only in South Asia but throughout the world.