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Guru Nanak Dev Mission Series 211

KHALISTAN

The Politics of Passion

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GURU NANAK DEV, MISSION
P. O. Sanaur, Patiala, Punjab
INDIA

55 PAISE

*Khalsa mero rup hai khas,
Khalse mein main karon niwas.
Jab tak Khalsa rehai niara,
Tab lag tej dieuo main sara,
Jab ai gahe bipran ki reet,
Main na karaun in ki perteet.*

- The Khalsa are my unique form
- In the Khalsa my spirit abides.
- As long as Khalsa remains distinct,
- So long will I endow them all my power.
- When Brahmanic customs they partake,
- Then I too will Khalsa forsake.

—Guru Gobind Singh

Punjab has been the problem State of India since independence. Even while Partition wounds were partially healed, it was rocked by several agitations both in favour of and against the formation of a Punjabi-speaking State for nearly a decade. Even after the formation of a unilingual State in November 1966, peace has eluded it because of the Akali demand for the inclusion of the Union Territory of Chandigarh and the adjoining Punjabi-speaking areas of Haryana and Rajasthan into Punjab and the refusal of a sizable section of the Hindus to accept Punjabi as their mother-tongue.

But during all these years there were only stray and minor clashes between the Sikhs and the Hindus. The recent murder of Lala Jagat Narain, veteran journalist and freedom-fighter, the alleged indiscriminate gunning down of innocent Hindus by some Sikh extremists at Jullundur and Tarn Taran near Amritsar, and now the hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane by extremist supporters of Khalistan are, therefore, pointed indicators of the sharp deterioration in the relations between the State's two major religious communities.

Even before the hijacking, this was a potentially explosive political situation. The Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, air-dashed to Chandigarh on September 22. met the leaders of all political parties and impressed upon them the dire need

to restore communal harmony. Predictably their response was prompt and enthusiastic.

It would, however, be nothing short of criminal complacency to conclude either that the worst is over or that the magic wand of peace committees would yield the desired results. Experience of pre-Partition days proves beyond a shadow of doubt that peace committees are rendered redundant the moment communal frenzy grips the people at large and the politics of passion begin to reign supreme.

Already much valuable time has been lost by successive Central Governments, due to their ignorance of Punjab's problems, their naive hope that these would get solved automatically with the passage of time, or for fear of complicating them further. Because of this indecision the perfectly reasonable demand for a Punjabi Suba within the Indian Union has assumed the dangerous dimension of a sovereign State of Khalistan in the space of about three and a half decades.

The genesis of the current problems of Punjab goes back to pre-Partition days when the Congress and the Akali Dal had forged a united front against the Muslim League. In pursuance of that understanding the Sikhs, under the undisputed leadership of Master Tara Singh, took a historic decision in 1946. They rejected out of hand the Muslim League's tantalising offer of a sovereign State, comprising areas lying in the west of Panipat and the east bank of the river Ravi, on the understanding that the new State would confederate with Pakistan on very advantageous terms to the Sikhs. They also-cold shouldered the British offer "to

enable them to have political feet of their own on which they may walk into the current of world history." Instead, the Sikhs accepted at its face value a "solemn undertaking" by the Congress promising "a set-up in the north wherein the Sikhs can also experience the glow of freedom."

Their belief in the bona fides of the Congress was strengthened in July 1947. The resolution passed by the Hindu and Sikh members of the Punjab Legislative Assembly at their meeting in Delhi favouring Partition of the country, contained the following reassuring sentence : "In the divided Indian Punjab, special Constitutional measures are imperative to meet the just aspirations and rights of the Sikhs."

But no sooner did India become independent than the "solemn undertaking" was forgotten. In spite of repeated attempts by one of the Akali members of the Constituent Assembly, Mr Hukam Singh, the Congress leaders refused to honour their commitment to accord special rights, privileges and safeguards to the Sikhs in free India. He therefore, vehemently and unmistakably declared in the Constituent Assembly that "the Sikhs do not accept this Constitution : the Sikhs reject this Constitution Act." His basic reason for rejecting the Constitution was that the ruling Congress party had not honoured the pledges given to the Sikhs on the eve of Independence. Mr Hukam Singh, therefore, declined to append his signature to the Constitution as a token of his categorical and irrevocable rejection.

But the Sikh leadership was then in no position to start an agitation, both for voicing its protest and for the redressal of its grievances for three main reasons : One, almost half of

the Sikh community was still recovering from Partition wounds. Two, Master Tara Singh; an inveterate fighter, had lost his pre-eminent position in Sikh politics, since most of his ardent supporters, who were originally from West Punjab, were scattered throughout the country and were busy rehabilitating themselves in extremely trying conditions and in unfamiliar surroundings. They could spare neither the time nor the money for the Panthic cause, as they had done too willingly in the past. Lastly, as the Akali leaders belonging to East Punjab, who were mostly Jats, had gained in strength and stature, they revolted against the tutelage of the non-Jat Sikh leader—Master Tara Singh.

Although virtually helpless due to the peculiar constellation of circumstances, the Akali leaders, more especially Master Tara Singh, never accepted the new Constitutional dispensation and continued to make noises against it. Soon after the formation of Andhra Pradesh following widespread disturbances by Telugu-speaking people, Master Tara Singh vociferously demanded the formation of a Punjabi Suba, though in vain.

Sikh hopes were rekindled when the Central Government appointed the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) in the winter of 1953. But the SRC rejected the case for a Punjabi-speaking State on the ground that “a minimum measure of agreement necessary for making a change” in the existing set-up, was absent.

Master Tara Singh described the SRC report as yet another instance of gross discrimination against the Sikhs. Had there been no Sikhs in Punjab, he said, a unilingual

State would have been conceded without a second thought. Denouncing the SRC report as a "decree of Sikh annihilation," he threatened to launch a "morcha" for the formation of a Punjabi Suba.

It took Master Tara Singh nearly three years to execute his threat. On April 30, 1960 he finally launched a peaceful agitation in support of his demand. Although over 57,000 Akali workers courted arrest, the Government remained unmoved. Matters came to a head when Sant Fateh Singh, a *granthi*-cum-social worker whom Master Tara Singh had nominated as "dictator", went on a fast unto death. Fearful of the dire consequences, the Union Government agreed to look into the grievances of the Sikh community. The agitation was called off and Sant Fateh Singh gave up his fast.

But the negotiations between the Akalis and the Government got bogged down on the question of whether the denial of a Punjabi Suba amounted to "discrimination" against the Sikhs. To realise his demand for a unilingual State, Master Tara Singh went on a fast unto death on August 15, 1961. But he gave up his dubious fast after 48 days. It marked the political death of the veteran fighter because he committed an unpardonable sin by violating his oath.

Before the Sikhs could recover from this terrible shock, the Government pressed home its advantage. A three-member high-powered commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Mr S. R. Das, former Chief Justice of India, to hear "the grievances of the Sikhs". The Akali leaders asked the Sikhs to boycott the commission on the ground

that no Sikh had been nominated to it.

Their appeal did not fall on deaf ears. Only five Sikhs appeared before the commission and listed the "privileges" which the Sikhs enjoyed under the Nehru Government. All of them were political non-entities. Their spokesman, Dr Gopal Singh, had a tainted communal past and was notorious for his negotiable political beliefs. (He has been rewarded amply and repeatedly by the successive Congress Governments ever since for the services rendered by him in their hour of trial. Currently, he is being considered for the post of a governor.)

Until his death on May 27, 1964, Jawaharlal Nehru refused to give in to Akali bluff, bluster and threats. In fact, in the wake of exposure of the hollow nature of the Akali threat, Nehru took the offensive. He told the correspondent of *The Times*, London, in an exclusive interview on October 2, 1962, that he would rather face a civil war on the issue of the Punjabi-speaking State than concede it. Lal Bahadur Shastri continued the policy of his predecessor.

Sant Fateh Singh, who had replaced Master Tara Singh as the leader of the Akali Dal, decided to launch a "morcha" once again for the formation of a Punjabi Suba. But before he could execute his threat, Pakistan invaded India on September 1, 1965. Instead of cynically exploiting the situation, Akali leaders promptly declared their unqualified support to the Government thereby giving a lie to the accusation of disloyalty to the country levelled against them by communal-minded Hindus over the years,

Greatly impressed by the role of the Sikh community in

the Indo-Pak war, Mrs Indira Gandhi (who had become the Prime Minister following Lal Bahadur Shastri's death) conceded the demand for a Punjabi Suba in March that year. The expert committee, which was appointed to determine the Punjabi-speaking areas, recommended the inclusion of the districts of Jullundur, Hoshiarpur, Ludhiana, Ferozepur, Amritsar, Patiala, Bhatinda, Kapurthala and parts of Gurdaspur, Ambala and Sangrur in the new State. Punjab was to have an area of 20,254 square miles and a population of 115.84—lakh, of whom about 56 per cent would be Sikhs. What was even more significant, 85 per cent of the total Sikh population in the country would be residing in Punjab, and on a live border. The new State was formally inaugurated in November 1966.

The boundaries of new Punjab did not satisfy the Sikhs in general and the hotheaded Akalis in particular, as these did not strictly follow the linguistic distribution of the populace. Moreover, Chandigarh which was especially built as the new capital of Punjab by the Nehru Government, was not awarded to Punjab. It was to be the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana, pending agreement between the two States on several ticklish issues.

To get redressal of these and other "wrongs" done to the Sikhs, Jathedar Darshan Singh Pheruman began his fast unto death on August 15, 1968. He carried out his threat and died after 74 days, on October 27. But his self-afflicted ordeal neither moved his co-religionists, who happened to be governing the State then, nor the Central Government whose members swore by Gandhism at the slightest excuse or pro-

vocation. This made the Sikh masses angry beyond words, with both.

To retrieve his position, Sant Fateh Singh went on another fast on January 26, 1970 declaring that he would lay down his life if Chandigarh was not handed over to Punjab and the contiguous Punjabi-speaking areas were not merged into it.

Realising the gravity of the situation, Mrs. Gandhi announced an award on January 29, 1970. Under its terms, she gave Chandigarh to Punjab, and promised the appointment of an expert committee in the near future to examine the question of merging Punjabi-speaking areas into it. But much to the chagrin of the Sikhs, she gave a part of Fazilka tehsil and Abohar to Haryana. The final takeover of Chandigarh and the transfer of Fazilka and Abohar was to take place by January 1975. The award is yet to be implemented.

Mrs Gandhi's award was unacceptable to the Sikhs for two basic reasons. One is that Fazilka and Abohar are not contiguous to Haryana. Hence, a corridor through Punjab would have to be provided to connect them with Haryana. The other reason is that when Mrs. Gandhi had, in her award also announced the appointment of a high-powered expert committee in the near future for redemarcation of the Punjabi and Hindi speaking areas, it was not correct on her part to grant the two rich cotton growing areas of Punjab to Haryana.

Even a loyalist like Dr. Gopal Singh could not stomach

this dispensation. In his keynote address to the All India Sikh Intelligentsia Convention in New Delhi on July 5 this year, he said : "A State based on the Punjabi language has been carved, but many Punjabi-speaking areas were left out for wrong and I should say blatantly communal reasons ..". He was also critical of linking "the question of Chandigarh with the transfer to a neighbouring State of our cotton-producing belt of Abohar and Fazlika..."

Six years later, in March 1976, Mrs Gandhi gave another award, this time on the sharing of the Ravi-Beas waters. Under it, both Punjab and Haryana were allocated 3.52 million acre feet of water each and 0.2 m.a.f. of water was given to the Union Territory of Delhi. Had this award been implemented, around nine lakh acres of cultivated land in Punjab would have been denied the irrigation facilities which they had enjoyed for over half a century. This would have spelt economic ruin as the State's prosperity rests largely on agriculture. (When the Akali-Janata Ministry came to power in the summer of 1977, it filed a writ petition against the award before the Supreme Court. It is awaiting disposal.)

The Sikhs have several other complaints of alleged discrimination. For instance, they feel sore over the ridiculously low Central investment totalling not even Rs 900 crore out of the public sector investment of nearly Rs. 40,000 crore since the commencement of the planned economy in 1951. In fact Punjab's share is considerably less, because in almost all the hydel power projects and multipurpose dams, one or more of its neighbouring States—Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan—have a substantial share, thus

reducing its actual percentage share to around one per cent.

The Sikhs in general refuse to accept the official argument that it would be an act of fool-hardiness to make huge investments in a border State like Punjab for two main reasons. One is that but for Madhya Pradesh, every other Indian State is vulnerable to a hostile attack either from land or from sea. Secondly, there is no target in the world today which can be said to be truly immune from an attack by guided missiles.

The Sikhs also complain that Punjab was being bled white because of the Centre's refusal to grant licences for setting up big industrial units in the State. Nearly 70 per cent of its cotton and about 60 per cent of its molasses are "exported" to other States rather than being put to industrial use within its own territories, with the result that it has to "import" finished goods for which it pays "value added" prices.

The absence of any gigantic industrial complexes in the State has resulted in industrial stagnation. Of the Rs. 360 crore bank deposits per annum, on an average, for the last two decades, Rs. 250 crore are used outside Punjab. Had these deposits been invested within the State over the years, Punjab's industrial economy, which largely consists of medium and small scale units, would not have become stagnant. The situation is likely to worsen in the years to come because of the severe competition its products will have to face from the up and coming local manufactures in other States and because of the absence of any big industrial units within its territory to encourage ancillarisation.

The Sikh peasantry too, is disgruntled because of the

Central Government's refusal to give a green signal to Punjab to go ahead with the construction of the Thein Dam, unless it concedes beforehand Haryana's demand for an unreasonably high share of water and electricity. Thus, while the Ravi's water continue to flow freely to Pakistan, Punjab continuously suffers from acute shortage of water and power.

A majority of educated Sikhs are also of the considered opinion that the Constitution is heavily tilted against their community. For instance, the word Hindu, whenever it occurs in the Constitution, is meant to denote Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs as well, except when its Articles pertain to the grant of special rights, concessions and privileges to the Scheduled Castes, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs are then put outside the purview of the word Hindu. The exclusion, they assert, is aimed at using economic sanctions, inducements and official patronage to attract the Scheduled Castes belonging to other religious communities back to the Hindu fold.

This section is also greatly exercised over Government interference in the personal law and religious affairs of the Sikhs. According to it, the Hindu Marriage Act has supplanted the Anand Marriage Act which was enacted in the first decade of the current century with great difficulty for legalising the Sikh form of marriage with the exclusion of Hindu rituals. Contrary to one of the basic beliefs of Sikhism, which regards marriage as an indissoluble bond the Hindu Marriage Act provides for divorce.

Again, the Sikhs are angry over the promulgation of an

ordinance in January this year amending the Delhi Gurdwara Management Act, without consulting the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), Amritsar, in gross violation of the Nehru-Tara Singh Pact of 1959. The pact clearly stipulates that no changes shall be made in the Gurdwara Act without prior consultation with, and the consent of the SGPC. They are also unhappy over the decision of the Union Government to bypass the SGPC in the selection of Sikhs going on a pilgrimage to their historic shrines in Pakistan.

Their other complaint is that no Sikh has been appointed Chief of the Army Staff so far. The claims of such distinguished officers as Generals Kulwant Singh, Harbakhsh Singh and Jagjit Singh Aurora were ignored. What is worse, the Central Government has gradually and systematically reduced the proportion of Sikhs in the armed forces from over 33 per cent on the eve of independence, to less than 12 per cent today. To reduce the Sikh share further, the Union Government in 1974 fixed Punjab's share in recruitment to the armed forces to a mere 2.5 per cent. Of this, the Sikhs share works out to around 1.3 per cent.

Every Sikh is now asking : "Why should quotas be fixed for each State in a country where voluntary recruitment is in vogue, unless it is meant to shut out the Sikhs from the armed forces with a view to adversely affecting their economic position and social status further ?"

The Akali leadership as well as the Sikh masses also attribute the refusal of the Central Government to hand over the management of the Bhakra Dam to the Punjab Govern-

ment and to set up a separate High Court for the State, to communal considerations

The cumulative effect of all these real and alleged acts of discrimination against the Sikhs has been compounded by the fact that the Green Revolution has reached a plateau and Punjab's comparative prosperity is increasingly becoming precarious.

In the circumstances it is not at all surprising that some hot-heads among the Sikhs have begun to ask : "Hindus have got India, Muslims have got Pakistan. What have we got ?"

Excerpts from 'India Today' dated Nov. 30, 1981

GANGA SINGH DHILLON

"Dhillon holds an American passport. But, as he said in the course of two days of interview with India Today, "My flesh and blood are made from the soil of India and nothing can change that."

He demands neither a separate Khalistan nor does he advocate secession. Yet he has panicked the Indian Govt. into denouncing him, declaring him *persona non grata* and denying him a visa to visit India

There is not a shred of evidence to support the charge of CIA connections being levelled against Dhillon He makes no bones about his personal and abiding friendship with Pakistan's Zia.

"Am I a foreign agent ?" he asks, his piercing eyes narrowing, his lips pursed," "I am an agent, yes. I am an agent of Guru Gobind Singh, of Guru Nanak, and no one else. I don't need Zia or the CIA to tell me to do what I must do". He is a deeply religious man, whose flawless English is peppered with quotes from the Granth Sahib"

..... He supports designating a Punjabi speaking area to be declared a cultural homeland for the Sikhs, "where we can preserve our identity, our cultural economic inheritance, but within the Indian Union."

Some historians such as J.D. Cunningham trace the origin of the cultural separatism of the Sikhs and their demand for an autonomous region to the Baisakhi of 1699 presided over by Guru Gobind Singh. Dhillon claims that the "establishment of the Sikh commonwealth in 1799 was another milestone in this direction and the quest for re-establishing our national identity has been strong ever since the end of Sikh rule over Punjab and Kashmir in 1848. Sir Gokal Chand Narang, in his book 'The Transformation of Sikhism' used the term "Sikh Nation," as did Mohammad Latif in his history of the Punjab, and Mohsanfani in Dabistan."

"What have I said that is so terrible?" Dhillon asks with wounded outrage "When Sikhs assert their distinct national identity within the Indian Union, their aspirations are labelled as communal or separatist. But when the majority raise the slogan 'Hindi Hindu Hindustan' that is called, somewhat paradoxically, 'nationalistic.' Except for defence, currency and foreign affairs, the rest should be left to the Sikhs and their Hindu brothers in Punjab to decide. Sikhism is secular. Punjab will be open to all".

"If the Sikhs call themselves a nation, like the Tibetans the Kurds and Palestinians, and call Punjab their homeland, it should not mean a partition of the country. Recognition of, India's rich cultural and regional diversity is not likely to weaken its unity. At the same time, the denial of the existence of a cultural mosaic is not likely to strengthen it."

He then repeats what has become a Dhillon stock phrase; 'Whenever the Sikhs asserted their right of distinct cultural identity and autonomy, the mass media controlled by the majority screamed 'Partition' ! If one cries "wolf" too often

it is likely to pay a visit. Those who raise the spectre of partition over every Sikh demand are the ones who are unwittingly doing the greatest harm to the very cause they claim to espouse. If the majority persists in using these crude tools, India's balkanisation would be their responsibility. The issue of the Sikh nation cannot be wished away or washed away. We are not asking for the moon, but only a place under the sun, where we can lead a life of dignity worthy of the Khalsa Panth and in our own, little cultural republic."

...Aside from his perception that publicly expressed Sikh yearnings for a cultural homeland have been treated as treasonable and suppressed by governments for hundreds of years, Dhillon also expresses an admixture of economic and political grievances that are regularly bandied about at global Sikh conferences. They include the following : Rs. 200 crore have flowed out of Punjab for two decades with less than 10 percent being re-invested in the state; there have been no government investments of heavy industry in the Punjab which causes a drain of skilled labour out of Punjab; under a "planned conspiracy" labourers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are brought into Punjab to build roads, and the Sikh population of Punjab has dropped by 10 per cent during the last 14 years to 52 per cent of the state, Chandigarh "built on the flesh and blood of Sikh farmers who were ejected from their lands, is not being given to them.

He (Ganga Singh Dhillon) formed the world-wide Nankana Sahib foundation in order to preserve the (Sikh) shrines (in Pakistan) and assure the access of all Sikhs to them. During several meetings with Zia which later blossomed into personal friendship, Dhillon was able to obtain

from the Pakistani President not only an oral but also a detailed written commitment pledging that the Pakistan Government would take care of the shrines and facilitate free access to, and freedom of worship at, these holy places.

But Dhillon's main quest is to place the management and maintenance of the shrines under an international body of Sikhs as is done with the sacred shrines of other major religions of the world. Zia said in a letter to Dhillon that a statutory mandate would be required to achieve this and it would have to be routed through, or initiated by, the Government of India. "And the Government of India has failed to do this." Dhillon charges "Repeated efforts have failed to stir the Government of India".

(Referring to some of his patriotic services rendered to the Government of India) Dhillon says, "When they needed me they thought of me as a great patriot. I was all right then, but today I am not even allowed to go to Amritsar. They have imposed these restrictions on me to frighten Sikhs in India, to frighten Sikhs abroad, and to frighten Pakistan into not dealing with me."

Dhillon weeps, applying a forefinger and thumb to his eyes to hold back his tears. "I'd never do anything my father would be ashamed of. I am not answerable to Mrs. Gandhi or Zia or Reagan. My greatest power is my Akalpurkh. If in the memory of my father my tears roll, why should I hide them ? If in the cause of Nanak I am overwhelmed by emotion, why should not the tears roll ? But you won't see tears in my eyes in battle : I am a sportsman."

MOTHER OF KHALSA MEMORIAL TRUST

Guru Nanak Dev Mission has constituted a Cultural Trust entitled 'Mother of Khalsa Memorial Trust' to create interest of the college students in the Sikh way of life and to help educate them in the field of Sikh Religion, Sikh Ethics and Sikh history.

The objectives will be attained by holding periodical contests in items like (a) correct reading of Gurbani (b) rendering into simple language specified portion of Gurbani (c) speaking and writing on Sikh ethics and history (d) Shabad kirtan and (e) reciting poems on the lives of Sikh Gurus and eminent Sikhs.

To begin with, the Trust will serve the region comprising the whole of Punjab and districts of Ambala, Karnal, Hissar Sirsa, Kurkshetar and Sri Ganga Nagar. The entire area will be divided into seven zones as detailed below and contests will be held zone-wise and item-wise and prizes awarded to the winners.

ZONES

- (i) Amritsar and Gurdaspur districts.
- (ii) Hoshiarpur Jullundur and Kapurthala districts.
- (iii) Ludhiana and Ropar districts including Chandigarh.

- (iv) Patiala, Ambala, Kurkshetar and Karnal districts.
- (v) Bhatinda Sangrur and Hissar districts.
- (vi) Ferozepur and Faridkot districts.
- (vii) Sirsa and Sri Ganga Nagar districts.

The first contests will be held in Oct. or Nov. 82 and subjects of contests notified ahead

For further details correspond with Secretary Guru Nanak Dev Mission.

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Tract on 212 will be Japji Sateek Part II (Punjabi)

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It began modestly as a demand for a Punjabi Suba, and has now assumed the gigantic dimensions of a movement for a separate, sovereign Sikh State of Khalistan. Tracing the history of Sikh grievances and resentments, which have accumulated and festered over the years since independence, S. SINGH analyses the circumstances—religious, political and social—which have allowed extremists to take over the Suba movement and convert it into a crusade for secession, with its appendages of murder, violence and terrorism.

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