

The Doctrine of Guru-Panth Origin and its Characteristic Features

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Broadly speaking, the Sikh ideology is grounded in the religious experience of Guru Nanak and his successors. Even a cursory examination of the *Bani* of the Sikh Gurus, suggests that they were not inspired by any deity or personality of the Indic or Semitic tradition. Their denunciation of the contemporary religious beliefs and practices leaves no room for any doubt that they wanted to lay the foundations of a new social order of which the Unity of God and the universal brotherhood of humankind were of utmost importance. The successors of Guru Nanak continued to strive for his mission which ultimately fructified in the emergence of Sikh Panth in India. Before his demise in October 1708 at Nanded, Guru Gobind Singh discontinued the line of personal Guruship and instead conferred upon his spiritual as well as temporal authority upon the twin institutions of Guru Granth and Guru Panth respectively. The name 'Sikh' signifies a person who believes in One, All Sovereign God, teachings of the ten Sikh Gurus and Guru Granth Sahib. The word 'Panth' literally means path propounded by a religious teacher. The early Sikh community was known as *Nanak Panthis* (disciples of Guru Nanak) but with the creation of Khalsa in 1699, it came to be known as Khalsa Panth. However, with the bestowal of Guruship along with Guru Granth Sahib, the Khalsa Panth also assumed the status of Guru Panth. The present study seeks to underline that how the doctrine of Guru Panth developed into an institution and what are its characteristic features. However, before taking up the issue of Guru Panth, we will have to take a cursory glance at the ideological and historical developments that had taken place within the Sikh Panth prior to the investiture of Guruship on it.

Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the first Sikh Guru founded a new and separate fellowship which was open to all irrespective of caste, creed and sex. He considered himself the divine minstrel whose chief avocation was to sing the glories of God. Although he never claimed himself to be an incarnation of God, yet he made known the will of God through his *Bani*. He unequivocally criticized the contemporary evil order whether it was social, religious or political. He composed a number of hymns and used them for devotional singing. He went on great journeys through Indian sub-continent and west Asia and had interaction with a wide variety of religious people. During his sojourns in various lands quite a few people got attracted to his teachings. He organized his disciples (Sikhs) into congregational (*sangat*) circles. Finally, he settled at

Kartarpur (Now in Pakistan), a small town established by himself on the right bank of river Ravi. Here he founded a religious centre known as *Dharamsala*, where a group of dedicated disciples gathered around him. The disciples and adherents who flocked to him lived a corporate life in the *Dharamsala*. He taught them the basic principles of his faith and instructed them in the Sikh way of life. Besides worshipping together in the *Dharamsala*, they ate together from the common kitchen (*Langar*) run collectively by them. Before his demise in 1539, Guru Nanak chose Guru Angad, one of his disciples to succeed him on his spiritual seat. The line of successors established by Guru Nanak continued till the death of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru in 1708. The Sikhs believe that though the Sikh Gurus were different in person yet all of them were the carriers of one spirit (*Jyoti*), the 'Spirit of Nanak'.

Ideologically speaking, Sikhism is purely a monotheistic religion. It believes in One, All Sovereign God who is the Creator, Transcendental and Immanent as well. It out rightly rejects the theory of *avtarvad* and does not subscribe to the worship of various gods, goddesses, deities etc. The God of Sikhism responds to the prayers and sincere supplications, thus to invoke it there is absolutely no need of a priestly class. It implied that the Sikh ideology has made the human beings free from the slavery of animate and inanimate beings. Thus, human beings' first and foremost allegiance is to God alone. The idea of Unity of God is not merely a metaphysical or theological dogma but a supreme value to be cherished and practiced in this very world.

The traditional Indian world-view had been of negation. Although the Sikh teachings do not dispute the perishable nature of the world, yet it has not been despised simply as an illusion. The world is a reality though it is not as real as its Creator. The Sikh world-view takes into account all the spheres of life including the Mother Nature. The whole of this world is a *Dharamsala*, a sacred place to practice religion and live in. The world has not been divided into two distinct and opposite realms-- sacred and profane. It neither involves withdrawal from the world nor does it accept the decadent social order as it is. It calls for struggle not only to eradicate evil but to establish a fresh world order where the higher values of truth, justice, honesty, goodness, love, brotherhood, equality, compassion, etc are in full flow. The Sikh teachings do not preach pessimism but lay emphasis on active and purposeful life. Normal family life is not an impediment in the way to communion with God. The believer is exhorted to live a detached life amidst the worldly temptations. It takes into account the whole gamut of human relationship and encourages discarding the otherworldly attitude in order to become a useful citizen of the world.

Human being is not a physical body alone; he/she also carries a spiritual element which belongs to the creative genius of God. It is an interior (inner self) place where one can realize God in a mystic manner. Human being is held supreme among all the living beings. It distinguishes human beings from the animal world which in turn confer upon them special status and dignity in the cosmic plane. Human life is a gift of God, a mission and an opportunity to achieve the *summum-bonum* of life. Although human beings enjoy freedom of will, yet he/she carries responsibility to understand the meaning of being a human otherwise they would regress to the level of animals. Ego is the root cause of evil in this world and it results in alienation from God. Antidote to it is the meditation on the name of God which finds expression in the truthful living. In God's court one's status is measured only in the terms of good deeds.

The Sikh teachings endeavor to develop an integrated personality, a perfect one free from internal and external constraints of life. An enlightened man participates in worldly affairs in a positive manner to improve the whole environment of society. He does not shun social responsibilities rather keeps equipoise even in adverse circumstances and remains ever ready to serve the society. There is no legitimacy to divide the human beings on the lines of caste, creed, race, ethnicity, region, etc. All distinctions between man and man have been rendered invalid. The stress is on equality and brotherhood which are rooted in the principle of common origination of humankind. The Sikh teachings stand for casteless and classless society, guarantying equal rights to all the citizens. Usually, the Sikh teachings are summoned up in three terse phrases:

Kirat Karo (earn your livelihood by the sweat of your labour),

Naam Japo (meditate upon the name of God),

Vand Chhako (share your earnings with the others).

The Sikh concept of God, world and man; the resultant attitudes and the institutional set up were largely instrumental to establish Sikhism as a separate and independent religion. Up to the third and fourth Sikh Gurus, the Sikhs were settled in and around the Punjab. During the fifth Guru, the number of Sikhs increased spreading almost to all the important cities of Mughal India. In 1577, Guru Ram Das founded the city of Ramdaspur and excavated a tank, *Amrit Sarovar* (the pool of nectar) there. In 1589, Guru Arjan laid the foundation of central Sikh shrine amidst the *Amrit Sarovar* and subsequently the city of Ramdaspur came to be known as Amritsar. Here in 1604, Guru Arjan compiled and installed the Sikh Scripture, the *Adi Granth* in the central Sikh shrine known as *Darbar Sahib* (the exalted sanctuary of God). In the same precinct, the *Akal Takht* (the Throne of Timeless) built by the Sixth Guru stands witness to the Sikh idea of sovereignty. It symbolizes interlocking of the temporal with

the spiritual in Sikhism. It is the highest temporal seat where the Sikhs hold discussion on the matters concerning the community.

If we look into the congregational character of the early Sikh Panth and democratic traditions prevalent in it, then the investiture of Panth with Guruship looks to be a natural and logical development. A cursory glance at the early Sikh sources reveals that during his travels quite a few persons had felt attracted to Guru Nanak to embrace his faith. Wherever he found such disciples he had organized them into congregational circles popularly known as the *sangats*. The early disciples of the Sikh Gurus were called as *Nanak-Panthis*, however in due course they came to be identified as Sikhs or *Gursikhs*. The meeting of two Sikhs was known as a religious congregation whereas convergence of five or more Sikhs enjoyed the status of holy assembly. Initially, the Sikh *sangats* came into being at the instance of the Sikh Gurus, but gradually the Sikhs under the guidance of some spirited Sikhs, started organizing themselves into *sangats*. The *sangat* was like a guild wherein a group of likeminded persons was supposed to live a corporate life governed by certain common norms. The entry into *sangat* was open to all. There was no restriction of caste, creed, sex and status. However, the entrants were required to follow the principles of equality, brotherhood and devotion to the Guru and his ideology. Everybody men or women, high or low, rich or poor, all mingled together in the *sangat*. Significantly, the early Sikhs who had come into the fold of Sikhism, belonged to various low castes and professional groups of Indian society.

As a result of the missionary work of the Sikh Gurus, the Sikh mission had become equally popular in all the corners of Punjab. According to Bhai Gurdas the number of Sikhs in and outside Punjab ran into millions. The author of the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* remarks that there was no city in the Mughal Empire where the Sikhs were not found. Recent studies into the expansion of Sikh mission have confirmed that besides the Punjab, all the major trade routes criss-crossing the Mughal Empire, were dotted with the Sikh *sangats*. We observe that some of the *sangats* were known after the name of prominent Sikhs who were responsible for their organization, whereas some had come to acquire the name of a place or region to which they belonged. Every Sikh *sangat* was headed by a Sikh who was popularly known as *sangatia*. It seems when the *manji* and later on *masand* system came into existence, the organization of *sangats* came under the persons holding these institutions. The Sikhs, who had embraced Sikhism through the medium of *masands*, comprised the *meli* and *sahlang sangats*. Significantly, the Sikh *sangats* which had come to have direct connection with the Sikh Gurus were known as the Khalsa. Usually, the Sikh *sangats* visited the Guru annually on the eve of *Vaisakhi* and offered voluntary tribute. Besides, whenever the situation demanded, the Sikh *sangats* engaged

itself in *kar-bhent* to fulfill the specific requirements of the Sikh Gurus in the form of provisions, money, cloth and even war-material. With the passage of time the *masands* had gone corrupt therefore with the creation of Khalsa in 1699 Guru Gobind Singh abolished the *masand* system altogether and decreed that the Sikhs should not have any social and religious ties with the *masands* and their Sikhs.

The *sangat* was believed to be an embodiment of the Guru and God as well. In that capacity *sangat* was really a divine assembly which possessed the spiritual authority to intercede not only in religious affairs but was also thought of a most appropriate forum to deliberate and decide about the secular issues concerning the community. The author of *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* affirms that whenever a Sikh had a particular matter to supplicate, the *sangat* was requested to join the prayer so that his wish may be fulfilled. With the development of Sikhism, the responsibilities and activities of the *sangat* had increased manifold. Consequently, its role and status in the Sikh community had magnified manifold. Gradually, the *sangat* attained a status even superior to that of the Guru. The institution of *sangat* ushered in an era of social change of which equality, brotherhood, humility and devotion to serve the people, were the chief features. The organization, composition and working of the institution of *sangat* reflect the corporate and democratic ideals that had come to be cherished by the Sikhs as a consequence of the Sikh ideology. The doctrine of Guru Panth that Guru Gobind Singh promulgated at his demise has its roots in the pre-eminence of *sangat* in early Sikhism.

Up to Emperor Akbar's death in 1605, relations of the Sikh Gurus with the Mughals were friendly. Thereafter Emperor Jahangir followed a policy of religious intolerance. He was very anxious to stop the spread of Sikhism. Consequently, in 1606 fifth Guru Arjan died a martyr in the cause of Sikh faith at the hands of Mughals. It was the turning point in the history of Sikhs. Thereafter, the Sikhs organized themselves militarily under the sixth Guru Hargobind (1606-1644). It ushered in an era of armed conflict between the Sikhs and the Mughals. In 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru was arrested and thrown into prison by the Mughal state because he had championed the cause of Kashmiri Pandits against the Mughal policy to convert them forcibly to the fold of Islam. In November 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur was publicly beheaded in the Chandani Chowk of Delhi on the orders of Emperor Aurangzeb.

In 1699 on the day of Vaisakhi (29th March), the tenth Guru Gobind Singh instituted the Khalsa (Arabic *Khalis*, pure; free, directly under the control of Guru), a core of dedicated Sikhs wedded to the military and religious discipline

as well. It was to defend the Sikh community from the attacks of the Mughals and their allies. Women as well as men were admitted to this order by *Khande di Pahul* (baptism by double edged sword) known as ambrosia (*Amrit*) also. It was made up of water and sugar puffs stirred in a steel bowl with a double-edged sword by the five Sikhs one by one while reciting certain hymns of the Sikh Gurus. After the baptism a woman took the name of Kaur (princess) and a man with Singh (lion). They were to keep five symbols, besides adhering to a specific code of conduct. These symbols are known as five Ks: *Kesh* (uncut hair), *Kirpan* (sword), *Kachh* (short trousers), *Kangha* (comb) and *Kara* (steel bracelet). In the struggle that ensued between the Sikhs and the Mughals, four sons of Guru Gobind Singh fell martyrs, two youthful fighting in the battleground and two infants bricked alive by the Mughal officials of Punjab. Guru Gobind Singh wrote a long letter (*Zafarnama*) to Emperor Aurangzeb reminding him of injustice done to him and his resolve to fight the tyrannical Mughal state. On the invitation of new Emperor Bahadur Shah, Guru Gobind Singh travelled with him to Deccan where he fell to a fatal blow struck by two Pathan soldiers of the Mughal army. Before his demise in 1708, Guru Gobind Singh abolished the line of succession and invested the authority of Guruship in the Guru Granth and the Guru Panth. Resultantly, along with the Holy Book the mystic body of the Khalsa was elevated to the status of Guru for all the times to come. Thus, from the Sikh to the *sangat* and then to the idea of Guru Panth, is a long journey which the Sikh community has accomplished in the light of historical and religious experience of the Sikh Gurus.

Evidence at hand suggests that there was no confusion among the Sikhs about the temporal authority of Guru Panth. It was the collective/mystic body of the Khalsa Panth which on behalf the Guru was authorized to take decision regarding the secular affairs of the community. The Sikh Panth had come to believe that Spirit of the Guru is enshrined in the Sikh Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib and Khalsa Panth symbolizes the physical body of the Guru. The Sikh tradition is very emphatic on this issue:

ਆਤਮਾ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਵਿਚਿ, ਸਰੀਰ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਚਿ ॥

Sainapati, a contemporary and court poet of the Tenth Master, describes that just before the departure for his heavenly abode the Sikhs asked Guru Gobind Singh, “ who will be in your place?” The Guru replied that, “I shall only be represented by the Khalsa. I am concerned only with the Khalsa. The Khalsa is blessed with my own body. The Khalsa is my very self and I am closest to the Khalsa. From the beginning to the end I reside in the Khalsa.” He says:

ਏਕ ਦਿਵਸ ਕਾਰਨ ਤੇ ਆਗੇ । ਮਿਲਿ ਕਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਪੂਛਨੇ ਲਾਗੇ ॥
 ਕਵਨ ਰੂਪ ਆਪਨ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕੀਨੋ ॥ ਤਿਨ ਕੋ ਜਵਾਬ ਭਾਂਤਿ ਇਹ ਦੀਨੋ ॥
 ਤਾਹਿ ਸਮੈ ਗੁਰੁ ਬੈਨ ਸੁਨਾਯੋ । ਖਾਲਸਾ ਅਪਨੋ ਰੂਪ ਬਤਾਯੋ ॥

ਖਾਲਸੇ ਹੀ ਸੋ ਹੈ ਮਮ ਕਾਮਾ । ਬਖਸ਼ ਕਿਯੋ ਖਾਲਸੇ ਕੇ ਜਾਮਾ ॥
 ਖਾਲਸਾ ਮੇਰੇ ਰੂਪ ਹੈ, ਹੋਂ ਖਾਲਸੇ ਕੇ ਪਾਸ ।
 ਆਦਿ ਅੰਤ ਹੀ ਹੋਤ ਹੈ, ਖਾਲਸੇ ਹੀ ਮੈ ਬਾਸ ॥ (*Sri Gursobha*, p.132).

Bhai Prahilad Singh in his *Rahitnama* sums up the divine character of the Khalsa and its authority as the Guru. He says, “The Sikhs are required to deal only with the Khalsa. All other gods are of no significance. The Khalsa has been created on the orders of Almighty God. All the Sikhs are directed to consider ‘Granth’ as the ‘Guru’. Consider the Guru Khalsa Panth as the embodiment of the Guru. Any Sikh, who desires to unite with Me, should find the answers in these two i.e. the Guru Granth and the Guru Panth:

ਗੁਰੂ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਮਾਨੀਐ, ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਗੁਰਾਂ ਕੀ ਦੇਹੁ ।
 ਜੋ ਸਿੱਖ ਮੈਂ ਮਿਲਿਐ ਚਾਹੇ, ਖੋਜ ਇਨਹਿ ਮਹਿ ਲੇਹੁ ॥ ...
 ਲੈਣਾ ਦੇਣਾ ਖਾਲਸੇ ਆਨ ਦੇਵ ਸਭ ਝੂਠ ।
 ਅਉਰ ਦੇਵ ਇਉ ਮਾਨਇ, ਜਿਉ ਬਾਰੂ ਕੀ ਮੂਠ ॥
 ਅਕਾਲ ਪੁਰਖ ਕੇ ਬਚਨ ਸਿਓ ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਚਲਾਇਓ ਪੰਥ ।
 ਸਭ ਸਿੱਖਨ ਕੋ ਬਚਨ ਹੈ, ਗੁਰੂ ਮਾਨਿਓ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ॥

According to Bhai Nand Lal, the Tenth Master has explained that anyone who wishes to talk to me may do so by reciting, listening and understanding the Granth Ji. Those who are desirous of listening to my words may do so by reading and listening to the Granth Ji from the core of one’s heart. My personality is enshrined in the Granth Ji and there is no doubt in it. My third form is represented by those Sikhs who are drenched in the Gurbani all the time. He remarks:

ਜੋ ਮਮ ਸਾਥ ਚਾਹੇ ਕਰ ਬਾਤ । ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਜੀ ਪੜੇ ਸੁਣੇ ਬਿਚਾਰੇ ਸਾਥ ॥
 ਜੋ ਮੁਝ ਬਚਨ ਸੁਣਨ ਕੀ ਚਾਇ। ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਜੀ ਪੜੇ ਸੁਣੇ ਚਿਤ ਲਾਇ ॥
 ਮੇਰਾ ਰੂਪ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਜੀ ਜਾਨ । ਇਸ ਮੇਂ ਭੇਦ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਛੁ ਮਾਨ ॥
 ਤੀਸਰ ਰੂਪ ਸਿੱਖ ਹੈ ਮੋਰ । ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਰੱਤ ਜਿਹ ਨਿਸਿ ਭੋਰ ॥

The doctrine of Guru Panth implies that it represents the corporate body of the whole Sikh world and carries the authority of the Guru in regard to the temporal and religious matters of the Sikh community. But the decision taken by the Guru Panth must be in conformity with the Spirit of the Guru Granth, otherwise it will hold no sanctity. There are so many injunctions in the Sikh literature wherein the Sikhs has been advised to resolve the contentious issues through mutual consultation. The practice of taking counsel of five enlightened Sikhs was already in vogue among the early Sikhs. With the creation of Khalsa

by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699, this practice took the shape of an institution in the form of Five Beloved Ones. After the abolition of *masands* system, it was the Five Beloved Ones who were authorized to initiate the Sikhs into the Khalsa brotherhood. At local level these five were chosen from among the local Sikhs.

During the eighteenth century when the Sikhs were struggling for their very survival, they organized themselves into Dal Khalsa which had two wings of Taruna Dal and Budha Dal. Later on for the purpose of better coordination and rapid military action, S. Kapur Singh regrouped the Taruna Dal into five sections, each led by a separate Jathedar. When these Sikh military bands introduced the Rakhi system in the Punjab coupled with their territorial claims, there arose some differences among them. In order to remove all these differences S. Kapur Singh introduced the Misal system and consequently the whole Dal Khalsa was organized into twelve military bands known as the Misals. Every Misal was headed by a Sikh chief. However, irrespective of all these divisions, the entire body of the Sikhs was known as Dal Khalsa. For entry into the Dal Khalsa one was required to be a baptized Sikh adhering to the Khalsa code of conduct.

It was the collective body of the Dal Khalsa which put into practice the doctrine of Guru Panth in its letter and spirit. Before embarking upon any expedition as well as to resolve the contentious issues concerning the Sikhs, the Dal Khalsa used to hold a grand assembly of the Sikhs which was known as Sarbat Khalsa. Working on the principle of mutual consultation under the guidance of Five Beloved Ones, chosen for the occasion, the Sikhs held their meeting in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. After deliberations and counseling, the consensus that emerged was announced in the public. In order to sanctify it a prayer was offered and order (*Vak*) was taken from the Holy Scripture. Thereafter it came to be known as *Gurmata* i.e. the Guru's resolution. It was taken as a Divine command and every Sikh was expected to abide by it. There are so many examples in the Sikh history where in order to resolve the debatable issue or to make the Panthic will known on an issue concerning the community, the doctrine of Guru Panth was invoked and corporate decision was taken.

A cursory glance at the history of the Sikhs confirms that the doctrine of Guru Panth has played a vital role in maintaining the social unity and doctrinal originality intact. An oral tradition that had become widely spread in eighteenth century sums up the guiding principles of the Guru-Panth on which it had worked its way among the Sikhs. The tradition proclaims: '***Puja Akal ki Parcha Sabad ka Didar Khalse ka***' i.e. worship only the One Timeless Creator, counsel only of the *Sabad* (Guru Granth Sahib) and look like that of the Khalsa. It

suggests that except God, worship of any god, goddess, deity, idol, person, saint, ancestor, tomb, etc. is forbidden for the Guru Panth. First and foremost allegiance of the Guru Panth is to God alone not to an earthly master.

The institution of Guruship is of central importance to the Sikh Panth. For the Sikhs, Guru Nanak and his nine successors hold the status of Guru. Guru Nanak was a Divine preceptor and his Spirit came to dwell in his successors on their nomination to his spiritual seat. That is why the slogan of Ten Gurus one Spirit became a belief of the Sikhs. There was no basic difference between Guru Nanak and his successors. According to the author of *Dabistan* those who did not believe in the above doctrine were known as apostate. Therefore the Unity of Guruship has been the cardinal principle of the Sikh Panth. A true Sikh cannot compromise upon it. Guru Gobind Singh himself abolished the line of personal Guruship and in that place before his eternal abode in Oct. 1708, bestowed the Eternal Guruship on the Guru Granth and Guru Panth. Now the spiritual and temporal authority of the Sikh Gurus is vested in the Guru Granth-Guru Panth, therefore no one howsoever revered is authorized to claim equal status to that of the Sikh Gurus. The Sikh Panth by virtue of holding the status of Guru Panth is authorized to decide about the temporal affairs of the Sikh community but it must be in consonance with the Spirit/ message/doctrines of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Sikhism is a whole life system which incorporates into its sphere all aspects of human life. It is a Miri-Piri system which believes in holistic approach. It does not believe in segregation of temporality from the spirituality. Enlightened persons are supposed to take cudgels of Evil in order to eradicate it from all walks of life. Their intercession in temporal affairs for the sake of righteousness, justice, welfare of society is no way considered illegitimate. Time and again this stand has been vindicated by the Guru Panth at its different stages of history. Otherworldly approach towards the affairs of the world and humanity at large, does not find *locus standi* in the Sikh ideology authenticated by the Sikh Gurus.

One cannot fail in noticing that the early Sikh community had come to have its own socio-religious separate identity which was based upon its distinct socio-religious beliefs, institutions, customs, ceremonies, festivals etc. With the promulgation of Khalsa code of conduct the Sikh identity has become more pronounced and visible. The Khalsa code of conduct was the climax of the earlier Sikh code of conduct. It suggests that the Guru Panth pre-supposes the Khalsa code and it is the only sanctified code which the Sikhs are supposed to follow.

The origin of schism in early Sikhism had thrust it into serious internal crisis. These elements had put into stake the social unity of the Sikh Panth. Their variety of Sikhism was a serious challenge to the doctrinal originality of Sikhism. They have established their respective seats of gurudoms at different places. They have no scruples in hobnobbing with the Mughals mainly to usurp the leadership of the Sikhs. When Guru Gobind Singh brought into force the Khalsa code of conduct, he asked the Sikhs to swear off their social and religious ties with these schismatic groups and their followers. It indicates that there is no place for sectarianism and personal cult in the Sikh Panth.

Instead of individualism, the corporate life style was the hall mark of early Sikhism. The Sikhs used to worship collectively in their shrines. They partook food sitting together in the common community kitchen. Entry into the *Sangat* was open to all irrespective caste, creed and gender. In the congregation there was no discrimination on the basis of rich and poor, high and low status in the society. All mingled together without any inhibition. This all inclusive approach fructified in the creation of Khalsa on the Vaisakhi day of 1699 at Anandpur Sahib where the first Five Beloved Ones were initiated into the Khalsa brotherhood. Majority of them hailed from the so called lower castes. This monument event in the history of the Sikhs is famous for unfolding the Nash doctrine. It liberated the Sikhs from age old restrictions imposed in the name of religion, caste, family etc. It is very significant to note that the people belonging to lower castes had joined the Khalsa in droves and their role in the development of Sikhism was no less insignificant. On the basis of historical experience one can say that Guru Panth is not a socially exclusivist body but believes in all inclusive approach.

The Guru Panth stands for righteousness, justice and equality. Its mission is to root out the evil from all walks of life. It is not against any religion, ethnicity, dynasty, race or nationality but against the evil system and the forces supporting it. Thus Guru Panth does not believe in compromise with the evil rather asks for a struggle to exterminate it altogether in all its forms and manifestations. The Khalsa code of conduct signifies that the Khalsa enjoys the right to self-defense. It has sanctified the use of force for the just cause i.e. protection of the poor and defenseless. The Guru Panth stands for highest moral standards in public life. The higher moral values such as dignity, self respect, spirit of freedom, etc. must reflect in the behavior of the Khalsa.

It is obvious that the Spiritual authority of the Guru is enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib, whereas the temporal role of the Guru has been conferred upon the Khalsa Panth. Thus, corporate/collective body of the Khalsa Panth is authorized to interpret and put into practice the message of the Sikh Gurus as

underlined in the Sikh Scripture. The Khalsa Panth enjoys the status of Guru as long as it functions according to the spirit of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. To sum up we can say that the Sikh Panth owes its origin to the Numinous experience of Guru Nanak and his nine successors. It believes in One, Timeless, Creator, All Sovereign God; one Guru, the spirit of Nanak which was present in his nine successors; one Scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib; subscribes to one code of conduct for the whole Sikh world; one community, the Sikh Panth; abhors sectarianism and personality cult; and stands for the unique and independent identity of the Sikh Panth.