

CHAPTER XI

THE SIKHS WORLDWIDE

Sikhs Outside Punjab in India

Sikhism was founded by its founder Guru Nanak Dev in Punjab. All of his nine successors directly guided Sikhs for about 239 years from their central places situated in Punjab. Sikhs carried on their struggle for freedom and sovereignty against Mughals and Afghan invaders in Punjab. They wiped out both these mighty powers in a prolonged struggle and established the Sikh empire in Punjab. Most of the historical Sikh gurdwaras are located in Punjab, though two historical Sikh Takhats are situated out of Punjab, one Patna Sahib, in Bihar state and the other at Nanded, Hazur Sahib in Maharashtra—both related to Guru Gobind Singh as he left for his heavenly abode at Nanded, the place of his last residence and he was born at Patna and lived there for 4 years before coming to Punjab at Anandpur Sahib. There are several Sikh historical shrines throughout India as Sikh Gurus had been visiting each and every corner of India for their missionary tours. Guru Nanak Dev had paid visits on his missionary travels to several other countries—Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey—and there are historical Sikh places in his memory in those countries as well.

Several Sikh historical gurdwaras mainly relating to the founder of Sikhism are now in Pakistan after partition of India in 1947 as place of his birth and childhood at Nankana Sahib, and the main residential place after his missionary tours at Kartarpur Sahib; both are now in Pakistan. Sikhs were spread throughout India from the time of Guru Nanak but the majority of Sikhs are in Punjab. Most of the Sikhs from west Punjab, which went to Pakistan in 1947, migrated to east Punjab and to other parts of India. Over twenty million Sikhs now reside in Punjab, the homeland of Sikhs, while over five million Sikhs reside out of Punjab in India and over three million of Sikhs now reside outside India in all the countries of the world. There would be hardly any big town or city in the world where Sikhs are not residing and where they have not constructed Sikh gurdwaras. Sikhs have earned a name for themselves and goodwill wherever they are residing due to their honest hard labour, devotion to their duty and commitment to their religion. They are scattered at different places and are conspicuous from their appearance.

In Delhi, the capital of India, Sikhs have a substantial population. They are well established in all the vocations of life and are financially sound and successful in business affairs. They have a prominent place in Sikh politics and Delhi administration. They have got enacted Delhi Gurdwara Management Board for the management of Sikh gurdwaras under Delhi Sikh gurdwaras act, to be directly under the control of Sikhs. There are historical gurdwaras of eminence in Delhi, particularly relating to the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur, the Ninth Sikh Guru, for his sacrifice for the basic human right of freedom of faith. A delegation of 500 Kashmiri pandits sought the protection of the great Guru at Anandpur Sahib as the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb was converting them to Islam under the force of sword. Guru Teg Bahadur went to Delhi and gave his supreme sacrifice to protect their religion telling the Mughal ruler that freedom of religion cannot be allowed to be crushed, though he was against the doctrine of rites and rituals of Hinduism. The sacrifice has no parallel in World history. Gurudwara Sis Ganj at Delhi is at the place where the great Sikh Guru was martyred. Gurudwara Rakab Ganj is at the place where his body was cremated, though his severed head was taken to Anandpur Sahib to Guru Gobind Singh by a Sikh, in spite of the maximum vigil by Mughal Army. There are several other historical gurdwaras in Delhi like Bangla Sahib in memory of eighth Guru and others in memory of other Sikh Gurus.

Gurdwara Rakab Ganj is just in front of the building of the Parliament of India. Building of the Gurdwara is in a spacious place giving the message that it was Guru Teg Bahadur's martyrdom that changed the shape of the country that was being turned into an Islamic state by the tyrant Mughals. This sacrifice further led to the crushing of Mughal rule by his son and successor Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru and their staunch courageous followers at the cost of their supreme sacrifices. How ungrateful was Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister and his congress government and party and other guilty ones who massacred the innocent Sikhs of these great Gurus in thousands at Delhi. They burnt to ashes their business concerns and even burnt and damaged several Sikh gurdwaras on the only illogical ground that Indira Gandhi, his mother had been shot at by her two Sikh bodyguards, because she had got attacked the Sikhs and Sikh holy shrines by Army. The Army tanks had practically demolished Akal Takhat and damaged several holy historical Sikh gurdwaras and murdered thousands of innocent Sikhs. Sikhs at Delhi were made to feel insecure in their country by the heinous crimes committed on them, which was totally anti national and counter productive and dangerous to the unity and integrity of India. But still the culprits were never brought to book as they had state shelter.

Sikhs are residing in every part of India, in all the towns and cities of India. They are well set in their vocations as professionals, businessmen, employees and agriculturists. They have cultivated vast areas of land in UP and have their own big agriculture farms. They are conspicuous from their appearance throughout India. Sikhs have constructed magnificent gurdwaras in the areas of their habitats. However, Sikhs are scattered and do not form majority in any state. So they do not command political

power outside Punjab. However, Sikhs are devoted to their religion and live Sikh way of life, commanding respect from others. In November 1984, just like Delhi, the Sikhs in most of the places in India were subjected to the same violence causing their massacre arbitrarily, though the victims were all innocent. The worst affected were the states governed by congress party. They felt a sense of insecurity in India, though Sikhs feel secure everywhere else throughout the world. The culprits for such heinous crimes against humanity were not arrested and neither prosecuted as they had the shelter of the state government. Such an unwarranted violence on innocent Sikhs under the instigation of central government and its leaders made most of the Sikhs demand a separate Sikh state. The anti national acts of the government and congress leaders are responsible for such a situation.

Sikhs Outside India

The overwhelming majority of Sikhs was and still is, in Punjab called Sikh homeland and all the Sikh Gurus provided their direct guidance to Sikhs, and Sikhs established their own Sikh empire. Sikh's migration to foreign countries started from 1870 A.D. after the annexation of Punjab by the British.

Sikhs migrated to Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand , Fiji, Hong Kong, America, Canada and England, from 1870 to 1920, though in small numbers, and got employment in these countries. Prior to 1921, some Sikhs from Doaba also migrated to New Zealand. The migration of some Sikhs to Australia also commenced from 1880, where they worked as hawkers and sugarcane cutters, but it was blocked in 1901. Migration to New Zealand was also stopped after world war I for some time and so was done to Fiji in 1930. Sikhs had migrated to East Africa from 1896. The Sikh migrants were expelled by Edi Amin from Uganda in 1972 and they migrated to England where there was already a substantial number of Sikhs.

After World War II, large numbers of Sikhs migrated to England from Punjab. The migration of Sikhs to West coast of North America commenced in 1903, mainly to Vancouvre in British Columbia in Canada; Washington, Oregon and California states in America. The spouses and dependant children of the migrants were allowed in 1919 onwards. There was large number of Sikh migration by 1980 with more than 100,000 Sikh population in Canada alone. From 1970, engineers and doctors migrated to USA in large numbers. Now there are about three million Sikh migrants in all the foreign countries outside India. Most of them are in USA, Canada and England.

The Sikh immigrants in these countries have set themselves up well in their vocations, in professions, business, employment and agriculture due to their hard labour and honest dealings. They command respect and recognition in every sphere. They own vast tracts of land in California USA and are well known to have set up orchards for the production of fruits of all the varieties in thousands and thousands of acres of land, besides the agricultural produce as well in several other states of America, as they have agriculture as their favourite vocation of life in their original homeland, Punjab. Sikhs

have earned high esteem as doctors, engineers, university professors, technologists and in all other professions in all the countries where they have settled.

Sikhs have constructed Sikh gurdwaras in the areas of their living and attend the religious functions on Sundays which are regularly held besides on other week days also wherever possible, in accordance with the established Sikh traditions. They are all attached to their religion very much though some of them could not strictly adhere to Sikh code of conduct as *Amritdhari* Sikhs having faced some difficulties to initially settle themselves but they deem it a proud to be Sikhs. None of them converted to any other religion prevalent in those countries. The second generation is also committed to Sikh religion, though most of their associates in schools, colleges and universities during the educational career and at their work places thereafter, belong to different religions and cultures. The younger generations in all the countries have no opportunity to study Sikh religion, Sikh history and Punjabi language in which Sikh scriptures have been written. So it is of utmost necessity that arrangements should be made for their study in these subjects. It can easily be done by utilizing the Sikh gurdwaras for this purpose to set up Sunday gurdwara schools, wherein all the Sikhs attending their gurdwaras should bring their children there for this purpose. In the times to come, independent Sikh educational institution can be set up wherever possible.

It is a matter of great optimism and pride for the Sikh nation that their religion has spread throughout the world in such a short span. Sikh identity is now well recognized all over the World and commands respect. The eminent scholars of World religions and history are unanimous now in holding Sikh religion to be a universal religion for the modern age, capable of solving the problems of the modern man and that Sikh scriptures contain sublime truths, the study of which cannot but elevate the reader spiritually morally and socially. They have recorded that the world today needs the message of love and peace of Sikh religion. Sikhs have been blamed for not having discharged their duty to bring Sikh religion to the notice of the world as it has the potential to establish the harmonious co-existence of all the world religions and faiths leading to world peace which stands disturbed today and to create the higher ethical and moral values in man and convert the narrow egoistic self-centered mind to highly conscientious God tuned with zeal of selfless service to humanity, which is the need of today. This aim has to be achieved in the twenty first century by the Sikhs who are a global nation now.

Sikhs to preach Sikh Religion in the World

Sikhs living abroad in all the countries of the world have to keep in mind that they are the Ambassadors of Sikhism. They should not do anything which negates the high esteem of their religion. Observance of the Sikh code of conduct and higher values of Sikh religion is their duty to enhance the high esteem of their religion. In fact a religion is itself spread when the followers of that religion practically exhibit the true values of that religion in their truthful living. They themselves get the high esteem from

others, besides the practical preaching of their religion. As the Sikhs have spread throughout the world, it is expected of them to lead Sikh way of life, so as to bring to the notice of the world the highest moral and ethical values of Sikh religion and its truthful living. The next generation, if taught the high values of Sikh religion and its code of conduct, would be able to live in true Sikh way of life and impart the divine knowledge of Sikhism to others.

The World has now become one community due to the advanced technology in communication as every one can be contacted within minutes. Sikhs should all be united throughout the world. One united world Sikh leadership is the need of the day. All the Sikhs have the same one religion, culture and the same common problems which should be cleared with at one Sikh platform. Though the Sikh historical places are mostly situated in Punjab, and Sikhs are a part of several parties of India but to every Sikh the same is the attachment with every one of them wheresoever he is residing. Though several Sikh gurdwaras connected with the founder of Sikh religion, Guru Nanak Dev and other Sikh Gurus are now in Pakistan, but every Sikh living worldover has the same reverence and concern for these Sikh historical places. Even as to politics, though it is more concerned with the Sikhs living in Punjab, who are in majority there but every Sikh feels concerned with it and is affected by it wherever he is residing in any corner of the world.

The preaching of the Sikh religion amongst the Sikhs to come under Sikh code of conduct with separate Sikh identity and then to bring it to the notice of the world can be made more easy and practical with the unity of all the Sikhs living everywhere in the world and by having their one world Sikh leadership. Such a leadership should be honest, competent and devoted to Sikh cause having the confidence of all the Sikhs to deal with every aspect of Sikhs (Religious, Political, Educational etc.) but without itself contesting any election or holding any of the office in these spheres. It should nominate other honest and capable Sikhs who deserve those offices and supervise their performance.

The eminent scholar of world religions, John Clark Archer, rightly remarked :

"The world today needs the message of Sikhism of love and peace."

Who is to convey this message ? Are only the Sikhs ? But not till they themselves understand and act upon this message of their religion and make their younger generation learn and understand and act upon this message. Unity of Sikhs and their Sikh leadership of honesty, integrity and capability is a must. Unfortunately neither the Sikhs as a whole nor their leadership has made themselves capable to understand and act upon the message of Sikhism earnestly, what to say of conveying it to others. The Sikhs are now spread throughout the world and have established themselves well in their vocations. They have set up their Sikh gurdwaras in every location of their residence in every country. It is now their duty to unitedly, without any useless factionalism, convey the message of Sikhism to the world in the 21st century, thus

becoming and acting themselves as true Sikhs and helping their younger generation to become true Sikhs as well. They have the vast resources for this purpose, throughout the world. Their religion has been commented by the eminent scholars like H.L. Bradshaw :

"Sikh religion is the religion for the present age and is truly the answer to the problems of modern age."

If still Sikhs ignore it, they will be at blame in history

The analytical study of the historical events of Sikh nation reveals that so far as the Sikhs became and acted as true Sikhs in accordance with the teachings of their religion, having been initiated with *Amrit* of double-edged sword and possessing the five emblems of Sikhs, dedicated to the daily routine of morning and evening recitations of *gurbani* as prescribed, and imbuing the mind with the name of God and doing virtuous deeds, then they accomplished such feats which average man cannot even dream off. But when they ignored these teachings and essential commitments, they failed to get things done which an average man could be expected to do. The honesty integrity and dedication to Sikh cause were somewhat replaced by the corrupt practices, selfish motives and insincerity to Sikh cause. Sikh religion demands strict discipline and adherence to Sikh code of conduct and submission to the will of God, the Almighty and practical truthful Sikh way of life, besides higher ethical and moral values to be reflected in all the spheres of life. Sikh religion converts the narrow egoistic self centered mind to God-tuned sense of higher consciousness to be activated throughout life with tendency of selfless service to humanity. If a Sikh does not become and act as a Sikh in all these matters, then he has to face humiliation and harassment.

Most of the Sikhs today lack these qualities and they want to adopt anti-Sikh principles of their own choice which can never be acceptable in the Sikh way of life. If someone is clean shaven, he dares to proclaim that he is Sikh from within and rather points out to the defects of some of the Sikhs who had been initiated and possessed the five Sikh emblems. If one remains with unshorn hairs, he proclaims that it suffices his separate identity without having been initiated. This is on the face of it a wrong conception. The essentialities to become and act as Sikhs of initiation with five emblems have been prescribed in Sikh code of conduct by Guru Gobind Singh, with the declaration that no one can be exempted from it. These are not to be one's own discretion. To become and act as a Sikh, these requirements as laid down in Sikh religion have to be complied with.

Who is to educate the Sikhs in this regard ? who is to ensure the compliance of the Sikh code of conduct by Sikhs ? Only the Sikh religious institutions, the preachers of these institutions, the office holders of these institutions are duty bound to ensure the compliance in their institutions. Thus all the Sikh Gurdwara management committees themselves should be strictly adhering to the Sikh code of conduct and be

eager and capable to preach the Sikh religion and take it in the right direction in their gurdwaras to at least bring all the Sikhs in their areas under Sikh code of conduct. The duties of Sikh statutory bodies are more onerous and they have vast resources at their command to be utilised for this purpose, honestly.

Sikh religion is now one of the first five main religions of the World. Sikhs are now spread throughout the world having constructed Sikh gurdwaras in their areas of living. Sikhs are well set in their professions, business, agriculture, technology and trades of all kinds. They have made a name themselves by dint of their capability, hard work and honesty of purpose. Sikh religion is commented by the eminent scholars of the world to be the religion of the present age, satisfying the developed juristic and scientific mind of today as it contains no superstitions and mythical imaginary stories. The message of Sikhism of truth, name of God and pious deeds is the need of the world today which leads to world peace and harmonious understanding and co-existence of conflicting thoughts, besides inculcating the higher ethical and moral values in human mind to be activated in all the socio political spheres. The Sikhs should bring to the notice of the world as being a universal religion for the entire mankind by becoming and acting as Sikhs themselves and making their younger generation to do so in the world.

Sikhs are even well established in the political field in several countries. In Canada, there are 6-7 elected members of Parliament and one or two Sikhs in the federal government. There are several Sikhs elected to the state legislatures. In British Columbia one Sikh had even become the premier of the state though ordinarily they are in the cabinets of the ministers of the province. In England some Sikhs have been also elected as the Members of Parliament. The Sikhs have established their presence in USA in every sphere. Similarly in all the countries, they have made themselves and their Sikh religion well recognized. Thus within a short period, Sikhs and Sikh religion has spread world over.

It is certainly a matter of great credit for Sikhs that they have constructed Sikh Gurdwaras in the areas of their living throughout the world and those are functioning in accordance with Sikh religious norms and traditions. It is also obvious that disputes have crept in most of the gurdwaras as to the elections or selections of the management committees or some other minor matters which have been taken to courts wasting the Sikh financial resources to a great extent and further leading to violence and fights at the gurdwaras itself and disrespecting the sanctity of these holy shrines. This brings them into disrepute by themselves. It sends the wrong message to the younger Sikh generations, who are to be encouraged to follow the Sikh code of conduct. Such disputes in gurdwaras should be totally abandoned, and unanimous decisions in all such matters should be taken, rising above party factionalism and egoistic tendencies and selfish motivations and vested interests. The personal differences should not reflect in gurdwaras. The teachings of Sikh religion are a sure guarantee to burn egoism, eliminate vices and inculcate virtues, besides creating love between man and man and

the higher moral and ethical values. Every Sikh is obliged to show due respect, regards and affection to each member of the Sikh panth besides the selfless service to the panth and even to the entire humanity in a sense of brotherhood. Conflicts among Sikhs have been forbidden in Sikhism and in the gurdwaras, such practices are anti-Sikh. The unanimous decisions in the presence of *Guru Granth Sahib* are the dictum of Sikhism.

A World Sikh Gurdwaras Tribunal should be constituted with retired Sikh judges of repute to be its members on honorary basis. Some non-controversial Sikhs of high repute and calibre can be co-opted from the areas of which there is some dispute relating to a gurdwara, in case not having been solved by members of the gurdwaras. The dispute should be referred to the Tribunal whose decision should be final. All gurdwaras should amend their constitutions for this purpose. In this manner, the wastage of Sikh finances can be prevented.