

## PURAN SINGH'S VIEWS ON KHALSA IDEAL OF GURU GOBIND SINGH

Hardev Singh Virk (hardevsingh.virk@gmail.com)

Professor of Eminence, Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab (India)

### Introduction

Professor Puran Singh was the first Sikh scientist from Punjab who got training in pharmaceutical chemistry from Tokyo University during 1900-03. He was a great genius who inculcated mysticism, vedantic philosophy, spiritualism and science during his student days in Tokyo. Puran Singh was a highly volatile and emotional young man. He became a Buddhist monk in Japan and then a Vedantin after a chance encounter with Swami Ram Tirath who was on a lecture tour of Japan in February 1902. He organised an Indo-Japanese club in Tokyo and started a revolutionary journal "Thundering Dawn" to focus on the plight of Indian masses under the British rule. On his return to India, he worked at the Forest Research Institute (FRI), Dehradun, in the capacity of an Imperial Chemist and published 53 research papers and about two-dozen books in English, Punjabi and Hindi. He was a great mystic poet and interpreter of Sikh scriptures. He was a visionary par excellence and his concept of Khalsa democracy and interpretation of Sikh cultural consciousness have relevance even today.

Puran Singh came to the Sikh fold under the influence of Bhai Vir Singh, the great Sikh savant. He wrote about the lives of Sikh Gurus in his popular book: "Ten Masters". *Spirit Born People* and *Spirit of the Sikh* are two other books which will form the nucleus of our essay. The creation of Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh was to accomplish the mission of Guru Nanak in this universe. There have been many attempts to interpret the mission of Guru Nanak-Gobind Singh in creation of the Khalsa but nothing compares with the unique interpretation of Puran Singh. According to Puran Singh [1]: "The creation of the Khalsa in India is the culmination of Guru Nanak's genius, and the written character of his Word. The *Amritam* of the Tenth master completely transmuted the men drawn from low or high castes of India, drawn from the Hindus or the Musalmans. He has given to him also a form which the great Master dreamt for the future universal man of God belonging to no one country, caste or creed. In the Khalsa there is seen the blending of the whole spiritual character of the man of the past and the future; as if it were a new creation."

## **Puran Singh's Tribute to Guru Gobind Singh**

Guru Gobind Singh is the Guru of the modern times. He is a Prophet who has reconstructed human society in this Brotherhood of *Nam, Dan, Snan, Kirt Karna and Vand Chhakna*. Assuredly, the slaves of India have not understood him so far and are not capable of understanding his genius. The shadow of his large personality falls far away above the head of centuries, and the so-called best intellectuals of India, when they spread out their mind to understand the Guru, get bruised by mere thorns and give him up as something not as spiritual as Guru Nanak. If they cannot see Guru Gobind Singh as the highest, brightest culmination of Guru Nanak, assuredly they do not understand that King of revolution of religious thought, the great Guru Nanak [2].

In his essay, "Guru Gobind Singh: The New Gita Himself", Puran Singh pays his highest tribute to Guru Gobind Singh in the following words [3]: "Guru Gobind Singh is the new Gita of India in himself and by himself. He is a modern type of Prophet who does not care for theory. He kills the tyrant by his sword. He alone had never felt sick or sorry in performance of his duty, nor shy of war or bloodshed, if he had to wade through it in championing the cause of the oppressed. And he is truly the living illustration of the modern philosophy and highest religion of the western races devoted to science and work to "Duty" and "Nishkama Karma".

The Guru did not eschew politics, in fact, he made the liberation of the people the cause of the assertion of his heroism; but surely, if the Sikh lives on the surface only, like the Englishman, for mere politics, votes and such inanities, one straying from the Guru's path forthwith becomes a traitor to his cause. All freedom is but a spiritual tradition of the life of the Khalsa: if the Khalsa spirit is dead, all freedom fails. The Khalsa is the son of the Guru who brings everywhere his Heaven and its delectable freedoms [4].

Out of the downtrodden, oppressed, lifeless slaves of the Punjab, Guru Gobind Singh moulded a nation which has in it the potentialities of a progressive nation of men. In the whole of India, the Sikh nation is the brightest spot still which has an inexhaustible will to die for the love of its ideals. When they are called upon, the Sikhs seek death as moths seek light. Guru Gobind Singh cut the moorings of this nation from its racial past and a nation wholly modern in spirit and mind

sprang up out of the Guru's mind, with a highly inspiring and most deeply reactive tradition and history of its own [5].

Assuredly, without the hair-idea of Guru Gobind Singh, there would have been no Sikh song and life today, except that the Guru Granth would possibly have been another Purana of the Hindus. Taking away the Sikh's hair is to put him off from his intensely reactive inspiration which has been so far a source of strength to the Hindu also. The long hair makes him distinctive; it does not alienate him. The spirit itself would have died without this unkempt exterior. The disappearance of the Sikh as such means the loss of a great national asset of power and inspiration for the Hindu himself. If the disciples of Guru Gobind Singh wish to become great as a political race, great as Walt Whitman says America seemed to be, then they may do what they will, but they cease to be His disciples. So the tresses of the Sikhs have preserved in them the Sikh history, which everybody else in the Punjab has already forgotten. They are an aspect of his deep, boundless gratitude to a Guru who staked his life; nay, his very religion to revive a dead people [6].

*Religious fanaticism was that the Guru never allowed to enter his court. Religious superstition was eradicated from the very blood of the Sikh. The Guru cleaned with his sword the darkness that clung and clings still to the endless philosophical hair splitting of the Hindu and the Jain. The liberation of the human mind was the first and foremost thought of the Guru. He liberated man from the slavery of the Devas, the Vedas, and put him to work [7].*

Puran Singh laments that the world of thought has yet to understand the Ten Gurus in the splendour of their thought which has been misunderstood due to the Brahmanical language they had to employ to express themselves and to the Brahmanical environment which always has been inimical to the true progress of man.

### **The Khalsa Ideal - State and Democracy**

Puran Singh is emphatic in his interpretation of Khalsa ideal of Guru Gobind Singh. According to him the Khalsa ideal was pregnant with the revolutionary tendencies for creation of the modern society. It had the germs of society based on equality, liberty and fraternity which was envisaged by the French revolution and the socialism of the Soviet Union. Puran Singh elaborates the Khalsa ideal [8]: "We can trace most modern tendencies of human aspirations in

the Khalsa that Guru Gobind Singh created in the Punjab. Some of us trace in the Khalsa the State, the society created by Guru Gobind Singh, the beginnings of a socialistic society. They founded society on the essential goodness of human nature, on love. Modern humanity is in a state of fermentation. It must come to accept the conclusions of the Guru on the idea of workable social reconstruction”.

“The Khalsa is the ideal future international state of man: it is an absolute monarchy of the kingdom of heaven for each and every man, the absolute democracy, and distribution of bread and raiment of the kingdom of labour on this earth - all in one. It is democracy of feeling all on this physical plane of life, where most misery is due to man's callousness to man. It is brotherhood of the souls where intensity of feeling burns out all differences [9]”.

Puran Singh further elaborates the virtues of Guru Khalsa State as follows: “If the Guru's ideal state, or even an approach to it, is ever made by man, no one will thenceforward die of hunger or go naked. Death cannot be prevented, innate differences cannot be destroyed; but physical privation will be prevented here on this earth by man himself. Let mountains be high, flowers small and grass low, but all shall be clothed with the beauty of God and fed with His abundance. The true vindication of the Khalsa commonwealth and its ideals as announced by Guru Gobind Singh, have yet to appear in terms of the practice of those ideals by those having faith in the Guru. The modern world is, however, busy evolving its version of the Guru's Khalsa state out of social chaos. This much be said at once, that the Khalsa is more than a mere republic of votes of little men who must be influenced to give votes. It is more than the Soviet, which aims at the change of political environment and law, to bring the Heaven of equal distribution on earth because without the transmutation of the animal substance of man, of selfishness into sympathy, there can be no true socialism.

The Guru Khalsa state is based on the essential goodness of humanity, which longs to share the mystery and secret of the Creator, and longs to love the Beautiful one living in His creation. The Guru thus admits man to an inner kingdom of the soul, where each and every person receives such abundance of pleasure and the beauty of His Love, that selfishness dies of itself. Inspiration to the higher life drives out the lower. Each one, according to his worth and capacity to contain, has enough of the inner rapture of the beauty of God in him, so that he lives quite happy and contented without interfering in anyone's affairs or robbing any of his rightful

freedom to increase his own pleasure. This endless self-sacrifice in utter gladness of a new realization is the sign and symptom of the true 'Nam' culture of the Guru. No one can be man of truly human society, who has not obtained this divine spark which puts the self at rest, which thereby imbibes nobility from God to leave everything along and gaze at Him with unending rapture and renunciation. Man needs to be truly and inwardly a divine aristocrat to be truly democratic in this world [10].”

In the constitution of the Khalsa commonwealth [11], the greatest act of genius of Guru Gobind Singh was when he transferred the divine sovereignty vested in him to the God-inspired people, the Khalsa. When speaking of the people, the Guru speaks of the people whose personality is transmuted into the divine personality of selfless being. As the chemist talks of pure elements just as they occur in nature, the Guru refers to the 'Pure' of the Cosmic Spirit and not as they are found with their blind animal instincts. In this one act lies our history and the future history of human progress. At Chamkaur when all was lost, he made His Five Disciples representative of the Guru, and gave them his insignia of Guruship and saluted them. The constitution of the Khalsa was thus built on the heart shrines of humanity inspired with love of God, on the God-consciousness of Disciples, and not on law-books. Guru Gobind Singh would have died fighting on the battlefield even, as a while before; his two young sons had obtained the glory of martyrdom. But these 'Five Enthroned' asked him to go from the scene, and to do for the Khalsa, what only he, Guru Gobind Singh, could do. So, he went, herein the Guru's benign submission to the will of the Khalsa was complete and unconditional. To obey, to continue to live instead of fighting and dying, even in that great personal affliction of having seen his sons and his dear disciple soldiers dying before him, overwhelmed by odds, yet to go and live for them, as bidden by them, is the supreme self-sacrifice of God for man, out of whose red flames of blood is born this Khalsa with the mysterious destiny.

In the Khalsa constitution, the people inspired by the natural goodness of humanity, by the spontaneous Divinity of God, by the Guru's mystic presence in all beings, are made supreme. They are the embodiment of Law and Justice fulfilled for ever in the love of Man. This state has but the Guru as Personal God. In this state, the Khalsa, the law of man's natural goodness is the only law [12].

Puran Singh is emphatic in his criticism of democracy of mere votes and elections. "Great men are true representatives of the people. So they have been in all ages, for true greatness is always representative. But the giants are gone and now the tiny dwarfs flutter and shake their wings. They have not the soul in them to take any responsibility. They have misunderstood democracy. By the introduction of the idea of democracy into politics, perhaps, that tall, Himalayan kind of human personality has been made impossible. All have become sand grains in one great level desert. The winds blow and the heaps of sand are gathered here and there and then are blown away. Such is the fate of human affairs in this age - a significant fate. All ideals are in the melting pot and from the great liquid will crystalize the New Ideals. Then the world tired of these dwarfs will cry for its old Himalayan giants again. Down with Democracy will they cry as they once cried Down with Kingship.

Puran Singh seems to contradict Mahatma Gandhi, "There is no such thing as Swa-raj, self-government: we are always governed best by a noble man, not by ourselves if we are not so noble. The rest are mere words, votes, democracy."

Democracy, the dream of modern civilization was established in this part of Asia in the exact modern sense in the realization of the spirit of Man. And the mortal fallacies which poison the human thought among the Soviets, were avoided by the Khalsa. The Khalsa made democracy its daily practice, driven by the inner feeling that is reborn of the spirit of the Guru, that all men are brothers. Democracy is not conceived as a social system, but as a true inner spirit-born feeling. Democracy is the moral feeling that naturally wells up in the Informed Ones.

The humblest brick-lifter has equal rights of joy and life with the king. A labourer who feels richer than a king and a king who feels poorer than a labourer - this is democracy of the spirit. The alternations of the outer conditions of life, even political resolutions cannot secure the equal distribution of land and wealth and labour; they cannot transmute human nature. Unless the change is wrought within, the volcanoes will burst forth again, and the lava shall flow as before, and all our leveling of conditions will be in vain. The Guru visualized this and leaving the outer surfaces of human nature untouched, changed the inner springs of action.

Guru Gobind Singh was neither a Caesar nor an Aurangzeb. He was the true king of the people and a comrade of the people, in the truest representative spirit. Guru Gobind Singh founded the true democracy of the people in which there were no dead votes or votes won by mental persuasion or interested coercion. Democracy was a feeling in the bosom of the Khalsa

and it gave an organic cohesion to the people who founded both society and state on the law of Love, on Justice and Truth, not an impersonal system of the will of the blinded mob-representation by sympathy and not by dead votes. The Khalsa-State is an Ideal; Sikhs may die, it does not. It is immortal [13].

But the polity of Guru Gobind Singh was not allowed to grow, far less to flourish, owing to the growth of hostile elements. Assuredly the Sikh's is not the Mogul *Padishahi*, but a state representing a foreshadowing of some future society and state. And only the future perfection of the State will make clear the significance of Guru's Khalsa. Assuredly, it is no revival of the caste-polity of the Brahmin that damaged Hindu society [14].

### **Concluding Remarks**

1. Professor Puran Singh was highly critical of parliamentary form of democracy, Soviet brand of socialism, Mahatma Gandhi's swaraj and modern secularism. He was the pioneer interpreter of sovereignty of the Khalsa doctrine of Guru Gobind Singh. I do not understand why Sikh scholars failed to give full credit to Puran Singh for his interpretation of the Khalsa ideal. Professor Puran Singh does not find any mention in the writings of Sirdar Kapur Singh, the founder of Sikh Homeland (Khalistan) concept.
2. Just for loud thinking, if we explore the reasons for failure of Khalsa Ideal of State and Democracy in India, we may refer back to Puran Singh's own ideas which have not been realized in practice: "The greatest act of genius of Guru Gobind Singh was when he transferred the divine sovereignty vested in him to the God-inspired people, the Khalsa." In theory, we have concepts of Miri and Piri of Guru Hargobind, as well as, Guru Granth and Guru Panth of Guru Gobind Singh. In practice, we have followed the dictate of Guru Gobind Singh partially, by our blind faith in Guru Granth, but ignoring the entity of Guru Panth for all practical purposes in decision making processes of Sikh Panth.
3. The rampant apostasy in Sikh circles may be symptomatic of the failure of true 'Nam' culture of the Guru, as envisaged by Puran Singh. In his preface to "The Spirit Born People", Puran Singh lamented: "Sikh youth are running in haste after shadows turning their backs on the Sun of Suns, the Guru. This world of the Guru is different and their world how different."

4. There is a need to establish Professor Puran Singh Chair in Punjabi University, Patiala. The University deserves all praise for publication of all the books and manuscripts of Puran Singh. But no effort has been made by Punjab Government to propagate the message of Puran Singh for the Sikh youth of Punjab.

## References

1. Puran Singh: The Book of Ten Masters, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1981, p.119.
2. Puran Singh: The Spirit Born People, Punjabi University Press, Patiala, 1976, pp. 125-126.
3. Puran Singh: Spirit of the Sikh, Part II (Vol. II), Punjabi University Press, Patiala, 1981, Chapter XXVIII, p. 303.
4. Puran Singh: Spirit of the Sikh, Part II (Vol. I), Punjabi University Press, Patiala, 1982, pp. 55-56.
5. Puran Singh: Spirit of the Sikh, Part II (Vol. II), Punjabi University Press, Patiala, 1981, Chapter XXIX, p. 313.
6. Puran Singh: Spirit of the Sikh, Part II (Vol. I), Punjabi University Press, Patiala, 1982, pp. 57-58.
7. Puran Singh: Spirit of the Sikh, Part II (Vol. II), Punjabi University Press, Patiala, 1981, Chapter XXIX, p. 321.
8. Ibid, Chapter XXI, p. 235
9. Puran Singh: Spirit of the Sikh, Part II (Vol. I), Punjabi University Press, Patiala, 1982, p.9
10. Ibid, p. 10-11.
11. Ibid, p. 23.
12. Ibid, p. 24.
13. Ibid, p. 27.
14. Ibid, p. 28.



