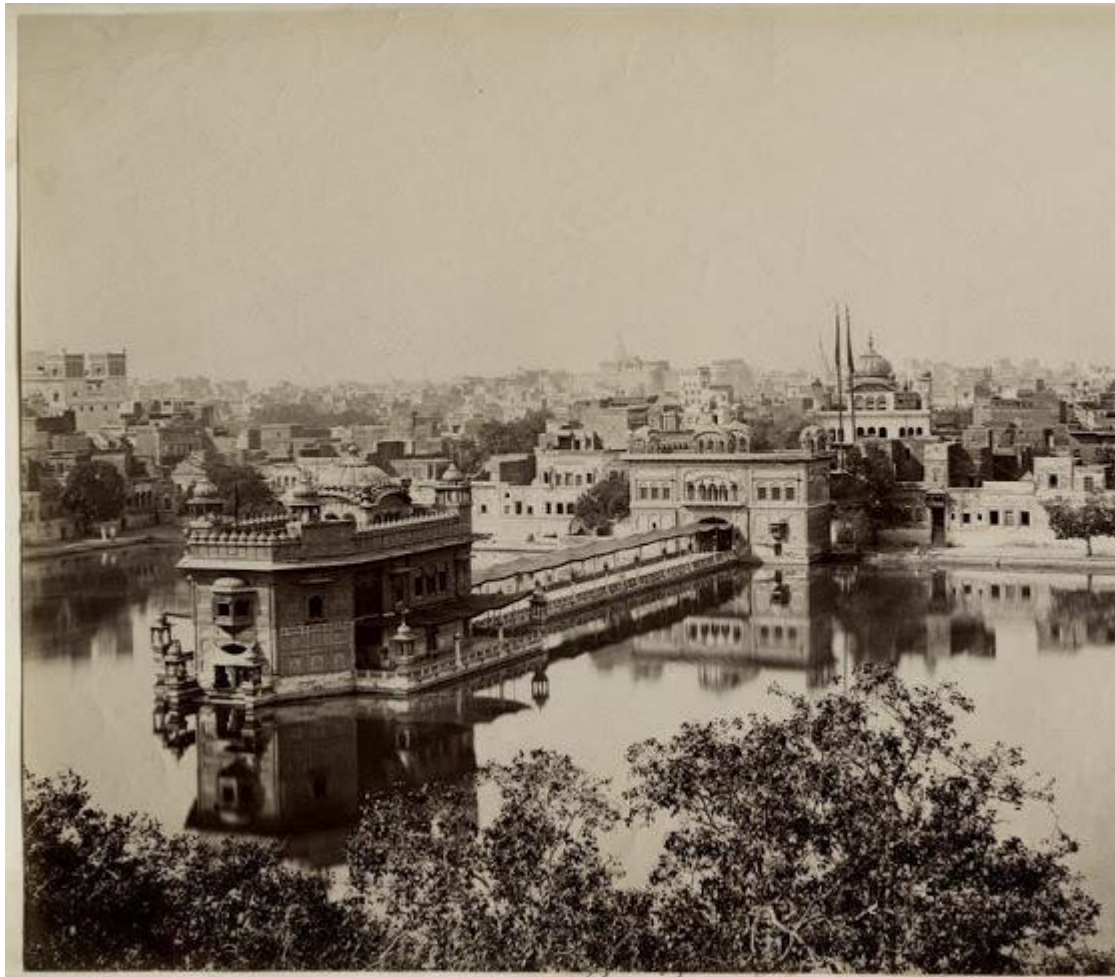


The Golden Temple: Its  
Theo-political Status—Sirdar Kapur  
Singh



The world-famous Golden Temple of the Sikhs, situated at Amritsar in India, bears Harimandir, 'the Temple of God', as its original name and it forms an island in a lake to which the name of Amritsar was given by the Nanak V, Guru Arjan (1563-1606), in the year 1589, when he laid the foundations of what is now known as the Golden Temple, and the town which grew around this Mecca of the Sikhs has subsequently acquired the name of Amritsar.

The Nanak V, requested his great contemporary mystic and Muslim savant, Mir Mohammed Muayyinul Islam, popularly known as Mian Mir, to lay the foundation stone of the temple and this fact, as well as the name bestowed on the lake, bears a basic significance in relation to the Sikh doctrines

The impact of Islam on North Western India in the 11th century had been through military conquest and sword and this had naturally slated reactions in the proud and sensitive, Hindu mind, that resulted in impassable barriers of hatred and prejudice between the two world-culture currents, and their mutual contacts have, therefore, left irritating and unfortunate monuments of bigotry and misunderstanding, spiritual and physical, that still mark the Indian scene.

The Sikh prophets, the Nanaks, desired to level down these barriers with a view to discover and provide a common spiritual ground for the two, Hinduism and Islam, where Hinduism gets over its injured superiority and sense of exclusiveness, and Islam, its arrogance, horn out of military superiority. The Nanak V declared:

musalmānu momdil hovai antar ki . . .  
mal dil te dhovai,  
duniyā rang na āvai nede jio  
Kusum pat ghio pāk harā  
- Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Maru-V. 13 iii. 12

“Let Muslims rediscover the truth that the essence of religious practice is compassion and its goal, the purification of soul, and the political utilitarianism is foreign to Islam as such, and let the Hindus concede that Islam, thus understood, is as respectable and ceremoniously pure as the flowers, the silk, the deerskin and the butter-fat.”

### **Sikhism - A Meeting Ground of Hinduism and Islam**

And since Sikhism was to be this common meeting ground between these two world-culture streams, that is why a prominent Muslim divine was asked to lay the foundation of the Golden Temple. Amritsar, name was given to the lake encircling this temple, as amrta means, the enduring principle of all that is, in Hindu metaphysical thought, and water is the symbol of the first impulse of manifestation the Unmanifest in Aryan thought-idiom, and the Golden Temple in the embrace of the waters of Immortality, thus, was intended to be a profound symbol of future confluence of the world-cultures into a universal culture for the mankind.

In this temple, the proposed centre of a world-culture and world religion, the Nanak V installed the Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, and ever since, the presiding place, even when the Sikh Gurus were personally present, has remained reserve for the Book

and the religious ceremonial and services have exclusively and always consisted of prayers to the singing prai” of, and meditation upon God in this sanctum-sanctorum of Sikhism.

It was in 1609, that the Nanak VI, Guru Hargobind (1595-1644) erected the Akal Takht edifice opposite the entrance bridge-head of the Golden Temple, upon which the Guru sat in state, wearing two swords of dominion over the two worlds, the seen and the unseen and the peculiar Sikh doctrine of Double Sovereignty took birth, the essence of which is that a man of religion must always owe his primary allegiance to Truth and mortality, and he must never submit to the exclusive claim of the secular state to govern the bodies and minds of men and the whole of subsequent Sikh History must be seen as an unfoldment of this Sikh attitude, if it is to be properly understood, the Nanak X, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) explained this doctrine to Mughal emperor Aurangzib, in a written communication the Zafarnameh (1707), in the following words:

cunkār az hamēh hiltē darguzusht  
halāl ast burdan b-shamshir dast.

“When all means of peaceful persuasion fail, it is legitimate (for a man of religion) to move his hand to the hilt of the sword.”

The Sikh doctrine of Double Sovereignty promulgated in the beginning of the 17th century, has curiously modern ring and flavour as from 19th century onwards, a growing school of writers in Europe have tended to think on the lines in which it is grounded. The main substance of this doctrine is that any sovereign state which includes Sikh population and groups as citizens must never make the paranoia pretensions of almighty absolutism entailing the concept of total power, entitled to rule over the bodies and minds of men, in utter exclusiveness. Any state which lays such claims qua the Sikhs, shall automatically forfeit its moral right to demand allegiance of the, Sikhs and there is thus an internal antagonism between such a state and the collective community of the Sikhs, represented by the order of the Khalsa, and in this deadly duel the State shall never emerge out as finally victorious, for self-destruction is the fruit of the seed of nonlimitation, and the status and the prerogatives and the Khalsa are imprescriptible.

The 19th century German writer, Schulse supports the basic premise of this doctrine by asserting that the view that the State is absolutely supreme and incapable of doing wrong is misconceived and dangerous (Deutsches Staatsrecht Vol ‘1 Sec. 16). The whole Sikh history is relentless jehād against this dangerous misconception, and the Sikhs have always insisted that any State fit and entitled to demand their allegiance must ab initio recognise and concede its own self-limited character, arising out of the principles of morality, the teachings of Religion, the principles of abstract justice, the principles of the Sikhs’ metalegal constitution which lays down that, (1) they must be approached and dealt with at State level as a collective group and entity, and (2) they must be governed impersonally, that is, through the rule of law and not by arbitrary will, and this self-limitation must further be circumscribed by the immemorial customs, long-established traditions and the facts of the history of the Sikhs. This Sikh doctrine is, in essence, the same which today finds explicit expression in the

modern concept of the pluralistic State, which recognises that the State, in practice, is the government, and the government is no more than a group in control of the governmental machinery, and that the aims and objects of this group, may any time clash with those of other groups, not in power. The government may be the temporary principal of all such groups, but it is only *primus inter pares*, the elder amongst equals; it is not the sole repository of power or focal of loyalty. This is, indeed, the sole essence of the Sikh doctrine of Double Sovereignty, which finds powerful support in the writings of Professor Harold J. Laski, Mr. G.D.H. Cole, and the French jurist, Duguit, and also Dr. J. N. Figgis.

The Sikh revolt during the 17th and 18th centuries, against the Mughal State was, in reality, an attempt to assert their doctrine of Double Sovereignty against the Muslim absolutist theomonist theory of State, as a result of which the Sikhs had no pass through the valley of death, as the narrative that follows would show, before they emerged out with the sceptre of political sovereignty in their hands, and it would be well to understand that the present bitterness and misunderstanding that clouds relations between the Sikhs and the State is also grounded in the same doctrinal conflict.

In the 1708 Guru Gobind Singh, after protracted, discussions and parleys with the Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah, the son and successor of Aurangzib, came to the firm conclusion that 'all means of peaceful persuasion' had failed, and it had, therefore, become the right and duty of Sikhs to 'move the hand to the hilt of the sword', and in the same year, (February, 1708) the Guru initiated a Hindu yogi and occultist, Madhoda bairagi, as a Sikh and renamed him Banda Singh, and then appointed him the Genaralissimo of the Sikhs, after conferring upon him the military title Bahadur. Banda Singh Bahadur, was then ordered to proceed to Punjab with the assignment of 'due chastisement of the Mughal rulers, who have usurped the power that belongs to the people, condign punishment of those guilty of atrocities, destruction of their military bases and reestablishment of the freedom of the people.' (Turken te nij levan bair pāthio Gur ne mujh ko kar banda, mai kar khuar bajide ko mar Sarhind ujad karehon suchhanda, Giani Gian Singh, Panth Prakash, Kavita (1880), III, 752.)

Banda Singh Bahadur carried out his assignment with admirable fidelity and in 1710 declared the freedom of the province of Sirhind, fixed as its capital the fortified Mukhalispur, in the hills, near Ambala, and the Sikhs adopted the legend on their State Seal, which began:

"We hereby place our impress of sovereignty upon both the worlds, the seen and the unseen." ("Sikkeh zad bar har du ālam.")

And thus they reiterated the basic doctrine of Sikhism, that of Double Sovereignty.

After the collapse of political power of the Sikhs under Genaralissimo Banda Singh Bahadur, in 1716, there follows a complete blackout till 1721, when the Sikhs shifted their centre of activities, their spiritual and political capital and their acropolis to the Golden Temple, the lake that surrounds it, and the complex of buildings, including Akal Takht, that are attached to it.

Ever since 1721, the Golden Temple with the complex of attached structures, has remained the centre of the Sikh world, the Sikh history, the Sikh, politics and the Sikh theophany. Throughout the last 250 years, whether the Sikhs were declared as outlaw by the State, whether the Golden Temple and its adjuncts were reduced to mass of ruins or they were forcibly occupied by the State whether the Sikhs were a sovereign people or politically, subjugated, they have never abandoned or compromised the position that (1) the Golden Temple and its adjuncts are the hub of the Sikh world, not as a matter of concession by any worldly power, but as the inherent right of the Sikh people, sui generis and inalienable, and (2) there is no ultimate dichotomy in the true Sikh doctrine between this world and the next, the secular and the religious, the political and the spiritual.

This position and this status of the Golden Temple is unique in the religious or political centres of world history.

It is the Mecca of the Sikhs, because it is the religious centre of the Sikhs, but it is vastly more.

It is the St. Peter's at Rome, for it is the capital of Sikh theocracy, but it is very much more and also something less and different. Sikhism has no ordained priestly class and, therefore, there can be no theocratic political state of the Sikhs in which the priests rule in the name of an invisible God. They have no corpus of civil law of divine origin and sanction and they, therefore, must have a state based on secular non-theocratic laws. It is, more, because it remains the real capital of ultimate Sikh allegiance, whatever the political set-up for the time being.

It is the Varanasi or Banaras of Sikhism, because it is the holiest of the holies of the faith, but it is not precisely that because the true Sikh doctrine does not approve of any tradition or belief, which seeks to tie up theophany with geography.

It is the Jerusalem of Sikhism because it is the historical centre of the epiphany of Sikhism but it is not precisely that because Sikhism, as a religion, is not history-grounded, that is, its validity is not tied up with or dependent upon any historical event.

It is not precisely the political capital of the Sikhs, because political capital presupposes a state under the control of the Sikhs, and when the Sikhs do have such a state, it is not imperative that its administrative centre must be at Amritsar, and even when it is, the Golden Temple and its precincts shall still retain their peculiar independent character apart from this administrative centre. When the Sikhs do not have a sovereign state of their own, the Golden Temple, with its surrounding complex, continuously retains its theo-political status, which may be suppressed by political power, compromised by individuals or questioned by politicians, but which remains and never can be extinguished, for, it is sui generis and inalienable, and imprescriptible.

It is owing to this unique status, grounded in certain peculiar doctrines of Sikhism that, many misunderstandings continuously arise concerning the use of the Golden Temple with its surrounding complex, for Political purposes', for allowing ingress into it and housing of those whom the political state may deem as "offenders", and for

pursuing, 'extra religious activities' from inside its precincts. The Sikhs, themselves, have never viewed any of these activities, started or controlled from inside the precincts of the Golden Temple, as either improper, or repugnant to the Sikh doctrine, or contrary to the Sikh historical tradition. The reasons for this Sikh attitude are three, in the main, not singly, but collectively:

One reason is that this geographical site itself is charged with theopathic influences such as no other known and still accepted site on earth, including the old site of the Solomon's Temple, revered by three great religions of the world, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, can claim to be.

### Prehistoric Antiquity of Amritsar

Ever since the man on this earth became civilised in any comprehensive sense, about four or five millennia ago, imagination seems to find some foothold to countenance the belief that the lake engirding the Golden Temple most extensive pre-classical civilisation of the most basic activity of man, the religion. The most extensive pre-classical civilisation of the world, the Indus Valley civilisation, stretched, in the third millennium BC from Rupar at the foot of the Simla hills to Suthagendor near the shores of the Arabian Sea, a stretch of one thousand miles, and the site of the Golden Temple lies in the heart of this great river-system. The prominently situated "Bath" or sarovar in the newly dug up ancient mound of Mohenjodaro, as readily suggests to mind the central significance of water reservoirs in the metaphysical thought idiom and religious practices of these ancient people as it springs before the mind's eye, the Golden Temple, lake-surrounded.

Our proto-historical records, the Pauranas, and the pre-Christian era Buddhist traditions definitely assert that, from ancient times, there has existed a natural and holy lake of water, (In Vaivasyatpaurana, a genre of ancient Sanskrit text reduced into literary form in about the first century of Christian era, but of much greater antiquity of contents there is mention of Amarkunda (synonym for Amritsar, Punjabi Amritsar), a holy lake situated betwixt the rivers Vipāsā (Modern Bias) and Airāvati (Modem Ravi)', for the possession of which, in the pre-History epoch of creation, a fierce struggle took place between the gods and anti-gods, for, the out come of this struggle would decide as to whether the forces of religion will triumph in the current world age or those of irreligious. The gods came out victorious and Amritsar is now the centre of ecumenical religion.) where the Golden Temple is now situated and the geophysical layout of the site amply confirms the probability of these assertions. A bird's eye view of the area, from an aeroplane even today would confirm the conclusion that, this site must have been a natural water reservoir for thousands of years past. The Vedic and Buddhist traditions of holiness attached to this site and the lake suggest an earlier and more ancient origin of this attachment, extending back to the third and second millennia of the Indus Valley civilisation, on the basis of the historical trend that once a holy place, always so and that, a new holiness must be grounded in some older one.

The creative imagination, therefore, is justified in discerning grounds for the belief, not altogether fanciful, that the holy lake and the site of the Golden Temple, was an ancient centre of theophanic human activity, at the dawn of human civilisation, round about 5,000 years ago, peopled by the Mohenjodaro race and further, that it was an

equally well revered spot for the theomatic rishís of the vedās.

It is interesting to recall here that when Guru Arjan was having the ancient alluvium of this lake cleared, a sealed masonry subterranean dome was sounded and exposed, which being opened up reviled a macerated yogi in lotus-posture, immersed in seedless nirbija trance. When the Guru reanimated him, he disclosed that he went into his trance “thousands of years ago”, with the object of experiencing the somatic touch of the Nanak, before entering into the utter Void.

This spot was commemorated by the Guru by the subsidiary lake, Santokhsar, which stands till today. Were some of the Vedic hymns actually revealed to the Aryans at the banks of this ancient holy lake, just as the major portions of the Guru Garth in the 17th century were? Intuitive imagination guesses so and there is no good reason to think otherwise. In the early centuries of the Christian era, when the ecumenical religion of the Mahayan took birth in the North West India in the form of the original Prajnaparmitta and the Sadharmapundrika sutras, the Golden Temple site and the holy lake were already an active centre of beehive Buddhist monk-communities, of which the great Nagarjun and Aryadeva themselves might have been the Abbots, during the periods of their creative activity, and if herein the intuitive imagination hovers near the truth, then it emerges that the site of the Golden Temple and the banks of its surrounding waters are the scenes of earliest spiritual activity of the civilised man, the highest watermark of the theomancy of the Vedic Aryans, the greatest achievement of the Buddhist mind and the most glorious efflorescence of the genius loci of the Punjab.

Coming to near modern history and times, the founder of the Lamest Buddhism in Tibet, Padanisambhava, a professor at Nalanda university who was invited to Tibet by the great king, Khri-sron-lde-btsan (745-797) in 747 AD is the patron-saint of Tibet and one of the greatest figures of Buddhism, and he is called, ‘Lotus-born’, to signify his theomorphic status, while his biographies unanimously agree that the ‘Lotus’ out of which he took his non-human birth, floated on the limpid waters of a sacred lake, which is identified as now surrounding the Golden Temple. To this day, devout Tibetans make long and hazardous journeys to visit and pay homage to this sacred spot of the marvellous origination of the Guru Rimpoche, the Previous Master.

If many of these surmises lack palpable root and material evidence, the fact does not render the intangible pull of this picture on the racial subconscious mind, any the less potent, and, indeed, the circumstances multiplies this potency manifold, as keen students of religious psychology well know.

Such a site, surcharged with such ancient and potent spiritual influences it was that the Sikh Gurus chose as the centre of the new world religion and world culture, which they inaugurated, and instinctively sensing its high spiritual potency in relation to the future of mankind, the Sikhs, during the last 250 years, that the secular state powers, in utter disregard and blind ignorance of, the implications of the Sikh doctrines have tended to regard this geographical spot as just another area subject to their political domain, have paid the highest price demanded of them, in vindication of the true theo-political status of the Golden Temple.

The second reason, therefore, which fortifies the basic Sikh attitude concerning the

theo-political status of the Golden Temple is grounded in the nimbus of the Sikh history that hangs over it and provides guiding precedents to the Sikh mind.

Till the demise of Guru Gobind Singh, the Nanaks, the Sikh Gurus, were centres of the Sikh movement, and afterwards, Banda Singh Bahadur took over the command of their political affairs. It was after the execution of Banda Singh Bahadur, and the collapse of the Sikh sovereignty which he had established on the political plane, that the Sikhs, collectively assumed the rights and duties of their doctrine of Double Sovereignty, and in 1721, Bhai Mani Singh was installed as the head-priest of the Golden Temple, who, immediately took steps to revive the true theo-political status of this place. A free community kitchen for the visitors and the disabled was started and politico-civic activities of the Sikh people were gathered afresh to be rooted around the Golden Temple. Khushwaqt Rai, the author of the manuscript, *Tarikhi Sikhan*, (1811) says that at this period, the Sikhs “lived in caves and thorny bushes, and subsisted on roots and blades of grass, and Zakriya Khan, the military governor of the Punjab, wondered that the grass-eaters should be so bold as to lay claim to sovereignty.” (Folio 44. b).

### **Mughals Conceded the Status of Subnation to Sikhs**

In 1733, when the Mughal government found that extreme measures of persecution had failed to persuade the Sikhs to compromise their basic doctrines and attitudes, they conceded to the Sikhs the status of a sub-nation, an autonomous political status, analogous to that offered to the Sikhs in early 1947 by Mr. Jinnah of the Muslim League. A revenue grant of a hundred thousand rupees and the better Patent of the Nawab were conferred upon the Sikhs, which they accepted with the reservation that, “the Khalsa meant to rule freely, cannot accept permanently, a subordinate position”. (Teja Singh, Ganda Singh, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, Orient Longmans, p. I, 121). All these developments took place and were finalised within the precincts of the Golden Temple, in front of the Akal Takht and further, these arrangements show that the government of the day, even during those early days of Sikh history, fully appreciated that the Sikh doctrines envisage that the state must deal with them as one people, and not by atomising them into individual citizens. Immediately, at the conclusion of these arrangements, the Sikhs proceeded to establish five military cantonments, one at the lake of the Golden Temple and the other four, at the remaining four sacred tanks that constitute the adjuncts of the Golden Temple, the Ramsar, the Bibeksar, the Lachhmansar and the Kaulsar. These arrangements, by their very nature, were doomed to failure and consequently, in 1736, the Mughal government authorities occupied the Golden Temple and its precincts, and it was under these circumstances that, Bhai Mani Singh approached the authorities for permission to celebrate the Sikh consortium of *dīvālī* in November, 1738 and he undertook to pay a sum of Rs. five thousand to the state for police arrangements, on the explicit condition that the government would not interfere, directly or indirectly, in the right of the Sikhs to collect at the Golden Temple, in complete freedom. Since the government authorities deliberately broke the terms of the agreement, and as is the invariable custom of governments, accused Bhai Mani Singh of having done it instead, Bhai Mani Singh accepted the penalty of death, inflicted by hacking his body into bits, limb by limb, rather than agree to pay the stipulated amount of Rs. five thousand, or earning a reprieve otherwise.



The next year, 1739, saw the invasion of India by the terrible Nadir Shah who sacked Delhi, put its inhabitants to sword and took away the peacock throne and the Kohi-noor diamond, as loot in his haversack. It was the “grass-eaters”, the Sikhs alone, out of all the peoples of India, who then came out of their caves and thorny bushes to attack the rear of the returning invader, till he reached Lahore, exhausted by this harassment, and the following conversation is recorded by a contemporary, between Nadir Shah and Zakariya Khan, the military governor of the Punjab:

Nadir Shah: “Who are these mischief-makers, any way?”

Zakariya Khan: “They are a group of vagabond mendicants who visit their Guru’s tank twice a year and then disappear.”

Nadir Shah: “Where do they live?”

Zakariya Khan: “Their homes are their horse-saddles.”

Nadir Shah: “Take care, my son, the day is not distant when these rebels will take possession of thy country.”

### The Sikhs Avenge Profanity of the Golden Temple

Here again, it was recognised by all concerned that, the Golden Temple is the hub of the Sikh universe. After its occupation by government in 1736, the Temple and its adjuncts were put to profane secular use, and were converted into central offices of the district officer, Mussalih-ul-din, popularly known as Massa Ranghar. When the news of this profane secular use of the sanctum sanctorum of the Golden Temple reached a group of Sikh refugees in the far off Jaipur, two of them travelled all the way to Amritsar, after taking a solemn vow that they would either cut off and bring back to Jaipur, the head of this arrogant government official or never return alive at all. In early August, 1740, this presumptuous government functionary was beheaded on the spot, during the early office hours, and his head was carried to the assembled Sikhs at Jaipur, in vindication of the Sikh doctrine of Double Sovereignty, with the Golden Temple as its acropolis.

The Sikh people thus lived a precarious existence, as stateless outlaws and aliens in their own homeland, when in 1746, Lakhpatrai, a Hindu Dewān, or chief minister of the military governor of the Punjab, took it into his head to out-herod Herod, to display greater zeal even than the Mughals to destroy the Sikhs and Sikhism, and besides ordering a genocide of the Sikhs, caused it to be, “announced with the beat of drum that no one should read the Sikh scriptures, anyone taking the name of the Guru should be arrested and his belly ripped open. Even the word, gur (molasses), which sounded like Guru, was not to be uttered, but the word, rorí was to be used instead. The word, granth was also to, be replaced with, pothí. Many volumes of the holy Granth were collected and thrown into rivers and wells. The tank of the Amritsar was filled with earth.” (A Short History of the Sikhs, op.cit.page 1,132).

It is not to be supposed that a man of the keen intelligence of his race and an energy peculiar to that by a subordinate position inspired, the chief minister Lakhpatrai would have missed the central significance of the Golden Temple and its adjuncts in

the Sikh scheme of things, and therefore, whereas he strove to destroy the cultural roots of the Sikhs, he did not neglect the Golden Temple in view of its theo-political status.

In March 1748, the Sikhs emerged from their hideouts and drove away the occupation forces from the Golden Temple, built a Medford to defend it, and reiterated that the Sikh people were an indivisible entity and sovereign sui generis. (Giani Gian Singh, Panth Prakash, Vartak. Delhi, 1892, p. 907).

In full realisation that, in the plains of Amritsar, neither their fighting strength nor the flimsy protection of mud-walls could save them from sure destruction by the Mughals, they resolved that, “no better death is conceivable for a Sikh than that which overtakes him while defending the great cause of Sikhism at this centre of Sikhism.” (Rattan Singh, Bhangoo, Prachin Panthprakash, (1837), Amritsar, 1914, p.325). It must always be borne in mind that this ‘Great Cause’ is essentially theo-political in content and not merely sorteriological, in the scheme of peculiar Sikh values, a position which is not correctly appreciated by those who honestly castigate Sikhs for mixing up politics with religion.

In 1749, the Sikhs cleared the holy lake of Amritsar of the debris with which it was gutted by the chief minister Lakhpatral, and in 1757, the Afghan conqueror, Ahmed Shah Abdali, invaded India for the fourth time, when he found, as before, that the Sikhs, of all peoples of India, resented his incursions into their country the most and made no secret of this resentment. Well understanding the theo-political status of the Golden Temple and its adjuncts, the redoubtable Abdali, had the temple demolished, its adjuncts destroyed and its lakes filled up and ploughed over, a strange precursor of the Second World-War Morgenthau plan of the Allies, calculated to eviscerate culturally and industrially the German people. The Sikhs however, refused to be cowed down, and in April, 1758 when the combined forces of the Marathas and the Sikhs had succeeded in driving out of the country the Afghan occupation forces, the Golden Temple was rebuilt and its holy lake cleared up, through the labour of the enemy prisoners-of-war and under the direct supervision of the famous Maratha chiefs, Raghunath Rao and Malhar Rao Holkar, who then humbly made an offering of Rs. one hundred twenty-five thousand at the Golden Temple and received ceremonial robes of honour from its head priest. These Maratha chiefs well understood that the restoration of the true theo-political status of the Golden Temple was an integral part of their Grand National project of regaining liberty of the people and the freedom of India.

In November, 1760, the Sikhs again assembled before the Akal Takht, at the Golden Temple and declaring themselves as the Sarbatt Khalsa, a Sikh theo-political doctrine, by which the Sikhs assume the powers and status of the centralised conscience and will of the people, resolved to take possession of Lahore, the seat of the Punjab government, a project delayed somewhat by the fifth invasion of the Abdali, the same year.

### **Sikhs Rescue Hindu women from Hordes of Abdali**

Abdali crushed the Marathas as an all-India power in the historic battle of Panipat, fought on January 14, 1761, but when the victorious invader was returning to

Afghanistan, the Sikh chiefs again assembled at the Golden Temple and resolved to take all possible measures to rescue the Hindu and Maratha young women being carried away as war booty by the Afghans. In pursuance of this resolution, the Sikhs made a determined attack of the rear of the foreigner at the Goindwal ferry of River Beas, and rescued over two thousand young women from the clutches of the Abdali and made arrangements to return them to their original homes. (James Browne, History of the Origin and Progress of the Sikhs, London, 1778, p. II, 22).

This process of rescuing young women, the Sikhs followed, till the invader crossed the River Jhelum, and this whole campaign was considered, resolved upon and sustained from the Golden Temple and its precincts.

### Abdali' s Vengeance on Sikhs

In 1762, Abdali returned to India on his sixth invasion, with the specific object of liquidating the Sikhs completely and finally, of destroying their cultural and spiritual roots and of extirpating their very memory from the minds of the people, so that there remains then, no power in India cherishing the temerity of opposing him. In a lightning attack, this greatest of generals that Asia has produced, the Abdali put to sword a large portion of the Sikh people, men, women, and children, over thirty thousand of them, near Ludhiana, took possession of the two original volumes of the holy Granth, prepared by Nanak V and Nanak X, and then proceeded to complete his task by blowing up the Golden Temple with gun powder, destroyed its other adjuncts, and filled the holy lake, after desecrating it "with the blood of cow." (A Short History of the Sikhs. op.cit.p.1,171). The Abdali, knowing full well the theo-political significance of the Golden Temple, had these operations carried out under his personal supervision, as a consequence of which he was wounded on the nose by a flying brick-piece on April 10, 1762, which wound remained a festering incurable sore till he died of it, on October 16, 1772, at Toba Maruf in the Suleman hills of Afghanistan.

The Abdali, however, had stayed in the Punjab, throughout the year, 1762, and on 17th October, 1762, more than sixty thousand Sikhs assembled at the ruins of the Golden Temple to challenge and chastise the Abdali for the arrogant sacrilege he had committed. Offers of peace and negotiations made by the Abdali were contemptuously and summarily rejected by the Sikhs and they inflicted a signal defeat on him and forced him to retire towards Lahore, and thus the Sikhs sought to vindicate theo-political status of the Golden Temple. Charat Singh, the grandfather of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was then placed in charge of restoring and rebuilding the Golden Temple and its holy lake.

It was on April 10, 1763, when the Sikhs as usual, had assembled at the Golden Temple in their bi-annual concourse that,

"Some Brahmin of Kasur came and complained against the Afghan inhabitants of their city, especially against the grandee Uthman Khan, who had forcibly carried away the wife of one of them and converted he to Islam. Hari Singh Bhang! Volunteered to help the aggrieved brahmins, and being supported by Charat Singh, after making a theo-political resolution, gurmata, led an expedition against Kasur. Uthman khan with five hundred of his men was killed and the brahmin lady was

restored to her husband.”

(Ghulam Mohayudin, Twarikhi Punjab, Persian Ms. (1848); also, A Short History of the Sikhs, op.cit.p. 1,174).

In October 1764 Ahmad Shah Abdali, invaded India for the seventh time, and on December 1, 1764, he paid a military visit to the Golden Temple to satisfy himself that the Sikhs no longer used this spot for “political activities”. He found thirty Sikhs standing guard at the entrance-gate of the Golden Temple, under the captaincy of Jathedar Gurbakhsh Singh, whose mausoleum still stands behind the Akal Takht, “They were only thirty in number. ‘But they had not a grain of fear about them ... They were resolved to sacrifice their lives for the Guru”, tells us, Muslim eyewitness, the author of the Jangnameh. (1766) (page 100).

On April 10, 1765, after the return of the Afghan invader, the Sikhs again assembled at the Golden Temple and took the political decision to occupy Lahore, as the seat of the Government of the Punjab and from that day till 1850, the Golden Temple and the Government of the Punjab with its other territories, remained under the sovereign dominion of the Sikhs. The Golden Temple and its adjuncts, even during the Sikh Raj, retained their theo-political autonomy and the writ of the Maharaja Ranjit Singh did not run within its precincts.

### British Device of Managing the Golden Temple

In 1850, the British masters of the Punjab took over the Golden Temple and its adjuncts under their direct administrative control and till the conclusion of the First World War, its theo-political status was maintained and superficially respected through a fiction and a device, into which the Sikhs willy-nilly acquiesced, after their failure to dislodge the British in more than one attempts. The fiction assiduously cultivated was that the British were the allies of the Khalsa, come to Asia in fulfilment of a prophecy of the Guru, to prepare ground for the eventual victory of the great cause of Sikhism, that of fostering a world-culture and establishing a universal society. The device was of managing the ceremonial and services of the Golden Temple and its adjuncts through a government-appointed Sikh manager, a kind of arrangement which the British rulers of India seemed to aim at but without the accompanying fiction. This arrangement broke down, when at the time of Jallianwala massacre in 1919, the British made the mistake of seeking to use the theo-political status of the Golden Temple in approval of the action of General Dyer. The Sikhs rose as a body against this UN-Sikh-like subversion of the true status of the Golden Temple and the Akali movement into which this Sikh resentment took shape, eventually succeeded in wresting the possession and management of the Golden Temple from out of the British hands, who by a statute passed in 1927, handed over not only the Golden Temple, but also other Sikh historical shrines in the Punjab, to a democratically elected body of the Sikhs, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, and this Committee still retains its rights and privileges, thus won.

Throughout the remaining British period, till 1947, the Sikhs zealously guarded the theo-political status of the Golden Temple and throughout, never hesitated to assert their right to use it and its precincts for the integrated Sikh activities of a theo-political character. Those into whose hands has now passed the power of running the

Government of India, not only upheld this right of the Sikhs so to use the Golden Temple, but they have, on numerous occasions, themselves so-employed these precincts.

### **Mohandas Gandhi Halls the Sikh Victory as First Decisive Battle for India's Freedom**

When in 1921 the British India Government, through their official representative, handed over the keys of the Golden Temple to Baba Uarak Singh, the veteran Sikh leader, Mohandas Gandhi sent him the following telegram: "Congratulations. The first decisive battle of Indian freedom has been won."

Mohandas Gandhi well knew, not only all about the theo-political status of the Golden Temple, but also knew and recognized that it was the centre of a world-movement for a universal culture and a united world-government, and thus it was basically integrated to the weltanschauung of Indian freedom, which later he refused to consider as a mere national independence from foreign rule.

### **Indian Government's Umbrage**

It was only after 1947, that, these politicians and men in power took umbrage at the Sikhs' desire to continue in enjoyment of their basic and historic rights pertaining to the true status of the Golden Temple, and as their repeated attempts to obtain control of the Golden Temple and other Sikh shrines, through their party men, the Congressite Sikhs, have been, on every occasion, foiled by a wide-awake and resentful Sikh electorate, their anger and their objections against the Sikhs taking the true theo-political status of the Golden Temple seriously, have mounted. It is now asserted that the Sikhs, in some way, transgress against the Holy Ghost and act treasonably, by employing the Golden Temple and its precincts for the purpose, for which they have always been employed, and for which they were intended from the very beginning. A grievance is loudly made out that the Sikhs, that is, such Sikhs who do not fall in line with the ruling party, mix up the profane with the sacred and thus injure the interests of the Sikh religion, about which their own solicitude is claimed to be greater than of the Sikhs themselves. Be that as it may, it must be granted that, the claims that the Sikhs make and the practices in which they indulge, have no element of novelty in them, for, they are in accord with their past history and traditions, their beliefs and their doctrines, and therein, they are neither guilty of insubordination nor of recalcitrance in relation to those who today yield the power of state, and if they displease and irritate, the fault lies not in their present temper or understanding but in their spiritual constitution and historical psychomental makeup, and that for which no individual is responsible, no individual can be blamed in fairness.

What is the third reason, the psychopathic and historical besides, which accounts for the present Sikh problem, which is again and again concretised around the theo-political status of the Golden Temple?

It has been said earlier that, it arises out of the peculiar doctrinal position of the Sikhs, out of which this theo-political status of the Golden Temple stems. This doctrinal position must eventually be traced to their view of the ultimate reality and the way it

has been interpreted in relation to the historical process through which the Sikh movement has passed. Sikhism does not recognise any ultimate dichotomy between the real and the unreal, and hence between the sacred and the profane, though it recognises a distinction between them, difference of immaculation between them. "God is real and all that He createth is likewise real, and there is naught but that He createth it." (Guru Granth, Gauri, Sukhmani, V.23.5). Sikhism, therefore, enjoins that a religious life must be lived and practised in the socio-political context. "The God is immanent in the human socio-political activity: know this through an understanding of the Word of the Guru" (Ibid, kanre-ki-var, III). It is from these premises that the validity of the sanctum sanctorum of the Golden Temple, where nothing but the praise of God and meditation upon Him may be made, conjoined to the Akal Takht, where the highest and the most hazardous political deliberations and decisions are frequently taken, arises. This ideological base then animates the peculiar metalegal constitution, which Guru Gobind Singh finally gave to the Sikh society:

"Previously, the ultimate authority had rested with the Guru ... Guru Gobind Singh, however, had abolished the personal Guruship and had vested it in the holy Granth to be administered by the Khalsa... The essential features of this central authority were that it was to be one and that it was to be exercised impersonally." (A Short History of the Sikhs, op.cit.p.1, 110-111).

## Conclusion

From this it follows that. (1) The Sikhs, wherever they happen to be in any appreciable numbers, have a right to be dealt with as a civic group, and an attempt to atomise this group for exercise of political power over them, constitutes an infringement of this right. The postulate behind this raw of Sikh social constitution is that on the socio-political level, the significant unit is the group rather than the individual, for, it is the group which lays down norms of conduct for the individual, (2) Political subjugation or slavery is incompatible with the basic constitution of Sikh society, (3) It is the implied right of the Sikhs to assemble freely, as such, to consider and deliberate upon any matters, that they may deem as vital to their interests, irrespective of whether these matters are of this world or of the other, and (4) the Golden Temple, and by analogy, the other Sikh places of worship, have a theo-political status which is not a matter of concession by a political state, but is a right, sui generis.

These are the four socio-political doctrines, which are implicit in the Sikh way of life, and it is these doctrines which impel a Sikh and the Sikhs to abhor personal rule or group domination.

George Forester in his book, A Journey from Bengal to England, London, 1798, p. 294-95 writes:

"From the observations that I have made of the Sicques they would appear to be a haughty and high-spirited people. Once I travelled in the company of a Sicque Horseman for some days, and though I made to him several tenders of my acquaintance, he treated them all with great reserve and a covert sort of disdain. There was no reason to be particularly offended by this hauteur towards me, for, he regarded every other person in the same manner. His answer, when I asked him very

respectfully, in whose service he was retained, seemed strikingly characteristic of what I conceive to be the disposition of the Sikh Nation. He said in a tone of voice and with a countenance which glowed with and was keenly animated by the Spirit of liberty and independence, that he disclaimed an earthly master, and that he was a servant of only the Guru on High.”

In the Sikh attitudes and the Sikh temper, which apparently irritate and anger those who have now come into power, it is well to perceive that the Sikhs are doing nothing merely to obstruct somebody's enjoyment of power. They are made the way they are, and they act the way they have always acted, and whether they are to be understood and accommodated or mended and bent, their position should be comprehended clearly, without obscuring prejudices. If the Sikh masses are used by individuals for ulterior purposes, the individuals do so by paying in service to the convictions that the Sikhs hold dear, and if they resentfully and doggedly have refused to lend ear to others, it is because the others, through wilfulness or ignorance, have failed to take note of these convictions.

In a democratic society, the Sikhs need not encounter any contradictions between their own collective convictions and the requirements of the state to which they owe allegiance. If, therefore, there are frictions, the fault must be found somewhere in the sphere of implementation of true democratic processes and the persons who implement them. A satisfied and properly integrated-to-the-nation Sikh people can be an invaluable and lasting asset to any state, more so to India in the soil and traditions of which they are rooted, just as a frustrated or suppressed Sikh people can be an obvious weakness in the strength of the nation.