



## 21. FOSTERING A CREATIVE VISION AND FAITH: THE EVOLUTIONARY JOURNEY OF SIKH GURUS

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### FOSTERING A CREATIVE VISION AND FAITH: THE EVOLUTIONARY JOURNEY OF SIKH GURUS

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Mankind has always had an awareness and a submission to a higher self. Numerous attributes, qualities and functions have been ascribed to this higher self, omni-presence, intangibility, all-pervading, all-knowing yet formless and fearless. This divine entity is almost always benign, merciful and forgiving. Faith and religion have complemented each other as bulwarks of humanity for ages. Wars and crusades have been fought over both and nothing has stirred human emotions as profoundly as faith and religion. Different civilizations have been guided in their moral, ethical, social codes by norms set by religion. Sikhism as a way of life is relatively a new entrant in this domain, yet stands out in its stress on equity and equality. The ten Sikh Gurus have guided millions of *Sikhs*, students, all over the world to find their inner world and ultimately, union with the divine. At times, the mortal journeys of the Gurus have been beset by obstacles and hindrances, due to fanaticism and religious persecution, which they overcame with their belief in an all-encompassing power, subsuming themselves in acceptance and submission. The martyrdoms of Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru and Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru were two such monumental events in Sikh history.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's sacrifice was greatest act in justification of human freedom and dignity. For this daring and sincere act of sacrifice, Guru Tegh Bahadur (the 9<sup>th</sup> Guru of the Sikhs) is remembered as *Dharam -di- Chadar*, protector of *Dharma*. In the backdrop of this religious execution of sacrifice, there exists a two hundred year old history of holy and societal transformation. The first eight Gurus had instituted that social stratum which emerged as a combined and consolidated organization and flourished with distinct features. Its origin lay in the principles of the consonance and assurance of the presence of God or of the equality and brotherliness of man.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469-1539), was the founder of this new stratum – the Sikh Religion. From his revelation derived the tenets of new faith. After his eucharistic communication with God, Guru Nanak Dev at once preached, "there is no Hindu; there is no *Musalman*"<sup>2</sup>. With this secular principle, he started his missionary work. Guru Nanak Dev brought a new conception of mutual morality and humanity to a society which was divided by conflict, all divisions of creed, caste, and race. To spread the divine message of love and truth, he travelled extensively, and through his poetical deliverance, he was successful in creating awareness and to shake the consciousness of people to large extent. In order to teach lessons to people from time to time, he remonstrated in slightly satirical terms and also sometimes he directly spoke against ritualistic holy performances and existing inequalities and injustices. The chief aim of Guru Nanak Dev's poetry was to attain the state of salvation i.e. liberation from the cycle of birth and death. At the same time, the basic aim of his teachings was to make innocent people aware about social and political abuses especially the filth, fraud, corruption, exploitation in the contemporary society. He openly made criticism and protest against the high handedness of the kings and their courtiers. He bluntly reprimanded the kings and their courtiers and held them accountable for numerous evils prevalent in the society during that period. He exposed the ethical deterioration that had taken root in the society under the tyrannical rule. He told people how underneath the name of religion, hypocrisy and falsehood had been approved, how people had started imitating the clothing

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<sup>2</sup> Puratan Janamsakhi: *Khalsa Samachar*, Amritsar, 1967, p.43