

## INTRODUCTION

It is imperative to describe the plight of the Hindus and the origin of the Sikh religion before moving on to the life of Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Nanak founded Sikhism in Babar's time. Hindu India had then been under Muslim rule for 350 years.

Muslims were tempted to invade India because of disunity among Hindus caused by political, religious and social considerations. The concept of nationalism was missing. Hindus were divided in numerous religious sects following diverse and sometimes diametrically opposite rites, rituals and beliefs. Their modes of worship were different and often they were at war with one another. Starting with worship of gods and demigods, Hinduism had degenerated into animal worship. The social fabric was in shreds. The caste system had become air tight. The Brahmins in their hey-day had introduced it to keep themselves in power and plenty. Shudras, the lowest caste, were condemned to eternal slavery and damnation. The old Vedic religion in the hands of the Brahmins had become savage and cruel. Religion stands for peace (outward and inward), goodness and righteous living. The Hindus then were bereft of the blessings of such a religion.

Before the onslaught of Islam, Buddhism had already made inroads in Hindu India. Buddhism, besides being simple, had rejected the caste system. The lower castes embraced it in great numbers and overnight gained equality with the high castes. Buddhism gained eminence over Brahminism till it was overthrown by the armed might of the Rajputs (of Agni Dynasty) adding fire power to the intellectual gun of Shankaracharya and his followers. These followers were mainly Brahmins and they exerted themselves extensively to restore the supremacy of the Brahmin, tighten the the stranglehold of the invidious caste-system and keep the common man ignorant and illiterate. But idol-worship introduced by Buddhism had its roots grown too deep to be uprooted. The philosophy of Shankaracharya that 'all is God' (Sabh Brahm he hai) failed to cut any ice against the caste-system and thus bring Hindus into one fold.

Shankaracharya was a follower of Shiva. His main disciple Ramanuja was a victory of Vishnu, who preached the worship of his god. He was instrumental in creating more off-shoots of Hinduism like Madhavi, Vishnu Swami, Vallabhachari, etc. Thus instead of integration further ramifications took place to make things worse for Hinduism. People were attracted to these new fountains of clear reasoning but found the filth of many kinds in their depths. India was weak and divided into inimical, political, social and religious camps. The Indians had become ease-loving pleasure seekers. Their physical well-being and gratification of sense-pleasures became the main purpose of their life. The devotees of Krishna were largely responsible for this moral degeneration.

The Brahmins reassumed the role of gurus who engrained in the psyche of the common man the indispensability of idol-worship and rites and rituals for spiritual uplift. His gurudom came to stay and cannot be shaken off even now.

Liberation is the destined end of human life. In order to cheat the common man of his worldly goods and money, the Brahmin advocated that this world of phenomena with its worldly goods, is untrue and the only true entity is Brahmin. So the common man should offer his worldly possessions to him, considering them untrue and worthless. He would look after their spiritual welfare in return. The votaries of shakti had become cruel and unchaste moral lepers. The Shaivites had taken to drugs, opium, chares, ganja and wine. Such was the sad plight of the Hindus. They were groping in the dark shrouded by superstition. They were no match for the one-God-loving (worshipping) fierce followers of Islam. The Hindus were stuck in the swamp of polytheism and manworship. They were at loggerheads with one another. The welfare of others was farthest from their minds. They were not united in anything.

The Hindu India looked an easy prey to the Mohammedans who turned their face towards it and overran it at their will. They destroyed the last vestiges of Hindu power and completely enslaved the people. They tried their level best to belittle the Hindus, rob them of their wealth and woman, reduce them to a servile and spineless people. In short they came to own Hindus as thoroughly as a man owns his cattle.

The Hindus could not withstand the relentless ramming of their citadel by the Mohammedans. Large number of the two lower caste of Hindus embraced Islam either under duress or willingly to escape the stigma of untouchability and slavery. The high caste Hindus were not greatly perturbed but rather felt relieved that the rotten limbs of the body of Hinduism had fallen off. "A good riddance," they mused. These high caste but purblind Hindus couldn't envisage that this limb was going to be rejuvenated and turn into their master. The neo-converts were more zealous than the invading Muslims and had no little hand in inflicting unspeakable horrors on their erstwhile masters and co-religionists. The idol-worship of Hindus invited the wrath of Muslims who considered it a holy duty to destroy the temples, along with the idols, of the infidels and bring them under the banner of Islam, Their proselytism assumed gigantic and horrendous proportions.

The idols were broken, the costly gems embedded therein taken away. The Hindu woman in their thousands were not only molested and taken into individual harems but were auctioned for the petty consideration of two dinars in the bazaars of Ghazni and other cities. Muslims and Hindus looked down upon each other; there was hardly any meeting ground between them. The tyranny of The victorious Muslims was boundless. In all walks of life the Hindus were treated like dirt. They were

butchered in thousands, *their idols broken and set in the door-steps of mosques where Muslims placed their shoes before entering*. They were asked to keep food-stuff, clothes and bare necessities life needed for a period of six months only and hand over the rest to Muslims. The chronicle of Muslims rule is full of death and decimation of Hindus, desecration and destruction of their gods, deflowering of their woman and denial of all rights to them. A Hindu was forbidden to keep a fine horse, house, woman, children and things with him, to ride a horse and to wear a white turban. The Muslim rulers exerted themselves constantly to obliterate the word "victory", its concept, its very thought from the Hindu psyche. Whenever a Hindu chess-player emerged triumphant over his Muslim adversary, he was ordered to embrace Islam or be beheaded, If a Hindu wrestler worsted his Mohammedan opponent in the arena, he had to convert to Islam in order to save his skin. It was a devilish and sustained scheme to emasculate the Hindus. The good things of life were not for them. It was considered magnanimity on the part of their victorious rulers to let them breathe and lead a life at sub-human level.

The Rajputs were once considered the finest flower of Hindu chivalry. Their pride, glory and manhood were ground to such fine dust that they vied with each other to offer their daughters in marriage to the Muslim princes and nobles. Thus the Hindu who looked askance at them was treated with scorn by the Rajputs. They had to pay jazia (tax) for remaining Hindus, and those who could not afford to pay, had to become Muslims. Hindus could not keep doors and lavatories towards west thus desecrating Kaaba.

Those Brahmins who embraced Islam were flatteringly called Sayyads. The raft of Hinduism was about to be sunk when it was steered clear of the dangerous shallows of sloth, superstition and ritualism and utter despondency by an able seaman no less than Guru Nanak Dev Ji. He preached the oneness of man and the oneness of God and denounced the caste system and its off- shoots untouchability, idol worship and cankerous ritualism and utter despondency by an able seaman no less than Guru Nanak Dev Ji. He preached the oneness of man and the oneness of God and denounced the caste system and it's off- shoots untouchability, idol worship and cankerous ritualism. He preached that Akal (God) is above birth and death. With disarming sweetness he used honeyed words which had the cutting edge of highly honed steel. The Brahmins felt the steel in his words but were powerless to fulminate against him. Guru Nanak assuaged to some extent the rancour between the Muslims and the Hindus.

The Hindus had lost their country and were on the verge of losing their identity and faith. They had got some respite in the reign of Akbar but during Aurangzeb's regency, cruelty and tyranny, bigotry and intolerance, and proselytism reached its pinnacle. The earlier Muslim rulers were prompted by

holy considerations in all their acts of cruelty and conversion. But Aurangzeb earnestly endeavored to obliterate the last traces of Hinduism from the Indian soil. As he had dealt fiendishly with his own brothers on his way to the throne, his showing of extreme cruelty to Hindus, the infidels, is quite understandable. Thereby he wanted to absolve himself of the sin of fratricide and inhuman treatment of his father Shah Jahan. The time had come for the annihilation of the Hindus. *Aurangzeb celebrated his victories by weighing heaps of the sacred threads of the Hindus, killed in the battle. The heavier the weight, the greater the victory.* All great Hindu Kingdoms had vanished from the Indian scene. The days of the Lunar Dynasty were over; the Yadav kings were a thing of the past. The scions of remnants of the Solar Dynasty like the king of Mewar were hiding in the fastnesses of jungles and hill nooks. The proud Rajputs of the Hindus was trampled upon and they lay inert under the Muslim heel.

The raft of Hindu Dharma was about to founder. It was rudderless, without a helmsman, far away from the shores with no hope ever of making it. In this predicament, piercing the mists of depression there emerged a figure of hope. This personage took the boat out of the clutches of the ravaging tempest and steered it to the haven of the shore. He was like beneficial rain for the withered and drooping garden of the Hindu Dharma. Like a true friend he alleviated the suffering of the Hindus. Who was he? No other than Guru Gobind Singh, known the world over. The sapling which was planted by Guru Nanak was watered by the blood of Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind and fertilized by their bones. Guru Teg Bahadur quickened its growth by injecting into its veins the vital fluid flowing out of his beheaded body. Guru Gobind Singh helped it mature into a full-fledged tree with the blood of his five beloved disciples, four sons and thousands of his followers. At last this tree bore fruit. Its fruit was nationalism, brotherhood, love and monotheism.

I am endeavoring to portray in the following pages the life of such a fine religious preceptor, great benefactor, peerless fighter, patriot and nation builder for the perusal of the readers. If it finds favour I shall be immensely beholden to them.

25th January, 1901.

- Daulat Rai