Dakhani Sikhs and the Legacy of Guru Gobind Singh

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The Dakhani Sikhs are residents of the Nizam of Hyderabad's state of Deccan now trifurcated into three states of Telengana, Maharashtra and Karnataka. Hyderabad and Nanded are the cities with largest population concentration of Sikhs. They claim to be the descendants of the Lahori Fauj of Maharaja Ranjit Singh that arrived in Hyderabad in 1830 at the Nizam's request to restore law and order in the state. They married local women and adopted local cultural and religious practices too without compromising Sikh tenets. They are particular about their Sikh form and identity and claim to carry the legacy of Guru Gobind Singh who spent the last days of his life at Nanded. They believe themselves to be sustaining the Sikh religion, though the Punjabi Sikhs call them 'duplicate' Sikhs.

Two centuries before the last guru, Baba Nanak traversed the terrains of south India including Bidar where now stands Gurdwara Nanak Jhira, an important centre in the Sikh religious itinerary of Nanded. The latter place, however, is known for the last guru's arrival in the Deccan, and departure to the other world. The overarching pre-eminence of Sach Khand Sri Hazoor Sahib Abchalnagar (gurdwara's name) at Nanded is more than conspicuous, and so is the influence and significance of Guru Gobind Singh associated with it. It is one of the five seats of Sikh religious authority (*takht*) and the only one in south India. It assumes importance for the Sikhs since the tenth and the last living guru not only spent the last days of his life there but bestowed gurudom to the Sikh scripture, the Granth Sahib, ordaining: *Sab Sikhan ko huqam hai, guru maniyo Granth*. The significance of the command may be gauged from the fact that it is inscribed on the face of the gurdwara. The Sikh scripture becomes the living guru of the Sikhs.

The legacy of Guru Gobind Singh in the lives of Sikhs and the Sikh religion is paramount. He completed the project launched by Guru Nanak and sealed it off for all times, giving its adherents a distinct *form* and *identity*. In this context, the event of 1699 at Anandpur Sahib (Punjab) giving 'birth' to the khalsa is seminally significant. Of all the castes, *panj piaras* (five beloved ones) belonged to the lower order belonging to five different castes and occupations and they came *from all four sides of the country*. More important than this, are the names of the volunteers namely Dharam Das, Daya Ram, Mohkam Chand, Sahib Chand and Himmat Rai. These names reflect and symbolise the qualities of the khalsa thus created by the guru. S/he must be an ensemble of dharma, compassion, strong/stable, office/status and courage respectively. The khalsa is expected to be sovereign who takes command or orders from the Timeless (Akal

Purakh Waheguru) alone; who has compassion for the poor and the oppressed, and is ever ready (*Khalsa soi jo nitt kare jung*) to fight courageously for their protection. And, since the first khalsa, the five beloved ones initiated the guru himself into their order, it overcame conceptually the duality of roles and functions between people thus assuming the oneness of being and her action(s). The guru, thus, becomes the disciple (*chela*) and vice versa, hence an epithet for him – *aape gur-chela*. By the same logic, guru is Khalsa and the Khalsa is guru. The guru uttered himself: *Khalsa mero roop hai khas, khalse mein haun karon niwas.*

The distinct form and identity make khalsa *civic soldiers for upholding dharma*, which means fighting for justice against any oppression and exploitation. What follows from above is the *love and respect for weapons* since these will be required ultimately for delivering justice. The weapons on the body are not only decorative and symbolic of royalty and hence of relative autonomy from state but functionally essential for the protection of dharma. In this world of inequality and disorder, these weapons inevitably become instruments of restoring order which is why it is prescribed: '*Chun kar az hama hilte dar guzasht, halal ast burdan ba shamsheer dast.'* This was the message guru wrote to Emperor Aurangzeb in *Zafarnamah.* He later warned the khalsa: '*Kharag hath jin tajhu kharag dhara saho',* that those who would loosen their grip on the hilt of the sword, may have to receive the sharp edge of their sword on their soft boneless necks. It was later affirmed by Sukha Singh in *Gurbilas Padshahi 10* – *'Bina shastar kesham nar bhed jano, kidhon kan te ko pakad le sidhano'*– that an unarmed person is like a sheep who is taken to the slaughter-house by anyone who catches it by the ear. Kapur Singh also affirms that arms and the unrestricted right to wear them, is a guarantee of freedom and sovereignty (Singh, 1989: 130). Thus, it becomes necessary for – *shub karman te kabhun na taron* (may I never sway from the righteous cause), and what makes it inevitable is the *spirit of militancy* enthused in khalsa for – *na daron ari son sab jai laron* (may I fight the enemy fearlessly) and subsequently – *nishchai kar apni jeet karon* (may I be victorious ever).

If this is the legacy of Guru Gobind Singh in the common sense perception of an average Sikh, authenticated by the scholars, we need to see how far Dakhani Sikhs seem to practise these elements of his legacy. The militant guru is 'ever present' amongst them, and pilgrims from all over the world thronging Hazoor Sahib are a constant reminder to them about the seminal significance of the Tenth Lord, *dasvin padshahi* representing the True Lord, *sacha padshah*.

Dakhani Sikhs

Dakhani Sikhs derive their identity and this nomenclature from the fact that they are settled in Dakhan or Deccan that means south in Punjabi/Urdu and in the administrative records of the colonial authorities as also of the Hyderabad state. Majority of them are not averse to this labelling, as they seem to justify: 'We are called Dakhani Sikhs because we stay in Dakhan.' The dominant view is that they are the residents of the Nizam's state of Hyderabad, qualified by Deccan

because there is another Hyderabad in the north, in the erstwhile United Punjab, now in Pakistan. It is called Hyderabad Sindh. Nanak Singh Nishter, a senior respondent and a journalist by profession, writes: 'Deccani is not a word for segregation from the mainstream Sikhs, but it is a geographical identity which was attributed to the North Indians settled in Hyderabad Deccan such as Deccani Pathan etc' (Nishter, 2011: 15).

Some respondents contest such labelling. They tend to argue that all Sikhs are alike and without any hierarchy. This of course, is a philosophically correct position in Sikhism. A Sikh is a Sikh only, without any label. Ideally, s/he must annihilate all hierarchies of caste and occupation, a message clearly stated by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. The Dakhani Sikhs' protest, thus, seem justified since it smells of not only segregation but of stratification too The Punjabi Sikhs consider themselves superior to them in terms of socio-economic status. It seems, this name (Dakhani) is given to them by the Punjabi Sikhs who settled in Hyderabad largely after independence in 1947. In the official records of the Nizam, there is no such labelling. They are called Sikhs simply, and their force as the 'Sikh Force'.

The Deccan State now stands trifurcated amongst three states of Andhra Pradesh (now Telengana), Maharashtra and Karnataka. The metropolis of Hyderabad, and Nanded in Maharashtra are their present day citadels although Sikhs are distributed all over the area. These Sikhs, most importantly, believe themselves to be the descendants of Lahori Fauj, the soldiers of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army. Briefly put, 14 Risalas of the above army came to Hyderabad in 1830 at the Nizam's request to restore law and order. They formed the Sikh Force, a part of the Irregular Troops under Nazim-i-Jami'at-i-Sikhan, directly with the Military Minister of the Nizam. It looked after their organisation, equipment, employment and payment of salaries. These troops were employed on police or escort duty, guarding the palaces of the Nizam, the central and district treasuries, the government offices and the residences of the wealthy and influential persons in the state. 'They assist the regular police in the prevention or detection of dakaities, highway robberies and other heinous offences. They also escort mail from one district to another, and are not unfrequently (sic) called into requisition for lending additional pomp and importance to social or religious processions' (*Report*, 1895: 141).

The Dakhani Sikhs also include the progeny of those Sikhs who travelled with the guru and stayed there to run the affairs of the gurdwara, now called Sach Khand Sri Hazoor Sahib. Its overarching significance may be gauged from the fact that the city (Nanded) itself is known to the Sikhs the world over as Hazoor Sahib. The oral history informs that the soldiers of Lahori Fauj married local women which is why their facial features are different from the north Indian Sikhs. Their social networking and marital alliances are confined still to the erstwhile Deccan territory, irrespective of the linguistic - Telgu, Kannada and Marathi - demarcation of the districts of their residence across three states. The Dakhani Sikhs make a homogeneous society on the socio-economic parameters of social stratification. They are primarily urban based and majority live in colonies that may better be classified as slums. The majority of them are

engaged in petty occupations including driving own three-wheelers or cabs etc. and small trading. The professional and status ranking persons amongst them may be counted on finger tips (Singh, 2014).[1]

They adhere to their religion strongly and take pride in maintaining it. The question of what is religion for the sociologists and dharma for the Sikhs is very significant to them. According to Clifford Geertz: 'Religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic' (Geertz, 1993: 90). The Sikh religion thus plays a tremendously important role in the construction of their selves, giving a distinct form including identity that of course is always social. Men are singular in this respect as their identity markers are manifestly visible, and more so because of their religion, that is not the case with women.

Moreover, Dakhani women wearing sari are not identified as Sikh, a Punjabi stereotype indeed. Usually, at least in certain quarters in Punjab, Sikh women are expected to wear Punjabi dress (*salwar-kameez*), definitely so while going to a gurdwara. The senior Dakhani women feel comfortable in sari at home and outside. Those in the middle, wear sari outside but the Punjabi dress at home. The young girls wearing jeans and trousers too, wear Punjabi dress while going to work and to a gurdwara.[2]

The Sikh Form

One thing very conspicuous in the Dakhani Sikhs is their formal religious appearance with complete Sikh look that means having a beard more often flowing than tied up and a turban or *keski*, a cloth piece shorter than the turban to cover the head. They are never noticed with a bare head. In popular perception, a Sikh must have a beard and turban conspicuously besides some other symbols. In Sikhism, those who have taken *amrit* have superior religious status and they observe strictly, the Sikh *rehat* (code of conduct). They must keep the five Ks or *kakar* and recite *gurbani* daily besides other restrictions. This makes one end of the Sikh continuum, a pure type, an ideal one going to the other extreme of *mona* Sikhs (Mcleod, 1989) and the whole range between the two types.

The Sikhs in the Deccan neither keep their heads uncovered as prescribed in the *rehat* nor cut the beard. In the younger generation too, it is not common. The significance of keeping hair is emphasised by Kapur Singh: 'One of the four grave breaches of discipline, any one of which results in automatic suspension from the Khalsa Brotherhood, is disregard of the injunction forbidding trimming or shaving of hair on any part of the body. Indeed, the breach of this injunction is viewed most seriously, with greater horror, than breach of any other injunction' (1989: 73). Uberoi too mentions, 'the custom of wearing long and unshorn hair (*kes*) is among the most cherished and distinctive signs of an individual's membership of the Sikh Panth, and it seems always to have been so' (Uberoi, 1996: 1).

The Dakhani Sikhs take two kinds of *amrit*, one of *khande di pahul* and other one of *kirpan* (sword).[3] As informed by the respondents the latter type is usually given to women and its observance is relatively lax. Now, men too take this type of *amrit*. The respondents are conscious of the fact that partaking *amrit* is not difficult but its observance is, which is why as one respondent commented and which others corroborated: We have not taken *amrit* since violating that is greater sin than not taking it.' All of them may not be continuing with its observance for this reason but each married person, male or female, has taken *amrit* once in their life since it is mandatory at the time of marriage.

The filmy style looks of - Salman Khan or Shahrukh Khan[4] - following the effect of media and the cosmetic industry that has influenced Sikh youth in Punjab, especially the Jutt Sikhs, has not impacted the Dakhani Sikh youth. The trimming of beard is even not common amongst them. The senior generation, of course, is orthodox. The Dakhani Sikhs' concern for their form, for instance, may be gauged from a 40 years old respondent's attitude in the Sikh village at Hyderabad. He did not mention the name of his younger brother while providing information for the questionnaire. Later on, looking at the family photo, it was discovered that he had been outcast from the family for cutting his hair. 'We have no relations with him,' he confirmed later.

It is important to note that many *amritdhari* respondents are not very fussy about having all the Ks, all the time and at all places. They may have these according to their convenience. For instance, they may support a *kirpan* like any other part of their dress and have no qualms in separating it from their body. It is pertinent to note that as per the Sikh *rehat,* an *amritdhari* is never supposed to part with it, come what may. One is expected to tie it to one's head while taking bath. It is also true of the breeches (*kachha*). After the bath, one is supposed to take out the wet from one leg and before taking the same out of the other leg, the fresh one must be slipped into the first leg. From the point of view of an orthodox Sikh, if this practice is not followed, it is a violation of *rehat.* The present generation is lax compared to their ancestors in this respect. *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, notes about the latter:

> They not only adopted the five K's,…, but also carried five weapons each, viz. two pistols, a sword, a dagger and a musket or, later, rifle. Moreover, they insisted on wearing their traditional dress comprising a *chola* (long cloak), *kachhahira* (drawers reaching down to cover the knees), and *chakkar* (sharp-edged quoits) over the turban. For over half a century they resisted the government's orders to put on regulation dress of the Western style (1998: 161).

From the perspective of the present day Sikhs in the remote areas of the Deccan, farther from the centres of puritanical prescription of Sikh religious practices of the ideal type, it is not much of an issue. The fountainhead of these puritanical prescriptions is the SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee) at Amrtisar. It has sanctioned these prescriptions codified in *rehat,* under the

influence of Singh Sabha ideology that the Sikhs are separate from other communities/religions following the episteme of difference rather than resemblance as is clear from *Hum Hindu Nahin* written by Kahn Singh Nabha in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. For 'ordinary' Sikhs, that is, those not executing functions of a religious institution (gurdwara), in their quotidian life it is not workable ordinarily to maintain the purity and prescriptions of religious orthodoxy of the ideal type. It was well said by an elderly respondent at Nizamabad: '*Amrit lena mushkil nahin, ise sambhalna mushkil hai*. *Yeh har admi ke bas ki baat nahin.*' It is easy to take *amrit* but difficult to sustain. It is not every body's cup of tea. Thus, having some of the five K's, as per their convenience, seems good enough to them as an identity marker, and that is what is expected of an average person in quotidian life. That is what these Sikhs do. They keep the turban and beard flowing, and many of them put on *kirpan* when going out of home. Since they are not particular about *rehat* they are labelled *kachae* Sikh.[5] Contrary to such labelling by the Punjabi Sikhs they believe that they are not *kachae* but *pakke* (definite/for sure/100 per cent) Sikhs.[6]

The point here is that the Dakhani Sikhs are very particular about any such visible symbol (*kakar*) that establishes their identity as a Sikh. It could be one or more of the five Sikh symbols in some combination thereof. There are different patterns. For instance, if one has hair (*kesh*), these must be kept covered with a turban or a *keski* also called *siropa.* These are invariably supported by the beard – flowing or loose, tied up and netted or may be trimmed. The other person may have *kesh* with turban and *kada* as visible markers of his identity. *Kirpan* is mandatory for an *amritdhari,* who may support it either outside the shirt or underneath but for others it is a symbol whose miniatures are equally potent and effective. The Sikhs, men and women both can have these miniatures on their bodies. The small comb (*kanga*) too has a *kirpan* and a *khanda* fixed on it. Thus, a Sikh may not be *amritdhari* yet s/he may have all the five Ks in this form including *kachha* in the form of a modern underwear. This two-in-one model works here too for majority Sikhs in routine life. The issue thus is, there are a number of sets and patterns of the Sikh symbols that people may support according to their convenience that may not appear enough to an orthodox Sikh observer but the bearer feels confident and considers themselves *enough of a Sikh*. Ravinder Kaur also notes in the case of Jat (Jutt) Sikhs of Punjab that 'Most Sikhs wear at least two of these overt symbols – the turban signifying uncut hair and *kara* or the steel bracelet. Most non-Sikhs identify Sikhs by these symbols' (Kaur, 1986: 222).

If the Dakhani Sikhs find themselves on a weak wicket on the issue of Gurmukhi, and get labelled as 'duplicate' Sikhs they retaliate in labelling the Punjabi Sikhs on account of not keeping the Sikh form.[7] An educated young man was very annoyed about it and commented: *'Hamey to Punjabi nahin aati, woh to Sikh hi nahin lagte*.' (It is right we do not know Punjabi but they do not look like Sikhs even.) The respondents of the senior generation too mince no words in claiming that they have conserved the Sikh religion that is in ruins in Punjab: '*Hamney Sikhi ko sambhala hai, Punjab mein to bura haal hai.'* The reference here is to the Sikh pilgrims from Punjab as also the Punjabi Sikhs in

the Deccan largely based in Hyderabad.[8] Historians may be contesting the interpretations of Guru Gobind Singh's southward journey, but the Dakhani Sikhs have a definite answer to this riddle. A retired police inspector who has family links in Punjab as well, remarked: '*Guru sahib jaani-jaan thhe. Voh Dakhan mein isi liye aaye thhe ki Sikhi to vahin bache gi, Punjab mein nahin*.' Literally, the guru had grand intuition. He knew too well that the Sikh religion will be saved in the Deccan not in Punjab, which is why he travelled southwards.

Sikh Identity

The question of Sikh identity, as of its form, is closely related to the practices of Sikh religion. The Sikh symbols are a manifest measure of a Sikh's form and identity. A male person having a beard and a turban are a sure sign of his Sikh identity. 'The existing literature on religion and identity is limited', according to Oppong. He continues: 'However, evidence from few studies in the area suggests that religion is correlated with identity formation. For instance, religiosity is found to be relevant in explaining commitment and purposefulness in terms of identity formation' (Oppong, 2013: 14). It is a positive correlation. This is something that Durkheim had talked about when religious solidarity is seen as a function of social circumstances. This would further affirm one's identity and reinforce commitment to group solidarity. Citing numerous studies, Hammond argues: 'Little doubt exists about the intimate link between religion and ethnicity. Whether the latter is conceived objectively or subjectively, and whether it is measured along the lines of acculturation or of assimilation, involvement in the religion characteristic of one's ethnic group is always judged to be powerfully correlated with the strength of one's ethnic identity' (Hammond, 1988: 3).

I propose to argue, following Jenkins that 'all human identities are, by definition, *social* identities. Identifying ourselves, or others, is a matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction: agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation' (Jenkins, 2012: 17). A manifestly active dialectic between social and religious identities historically provides the community a self-sustaining force for constructing and reinforcing its self-identity. The social history of a community is reinforced by the history of its members' religion and vice versa. The past and the present reinforce each other. This is not a real life distinction but for purposes of analysis and understanding.

By social history, I mean the history of the respondents' perception of self-identity at a place where they are a minority and the way others perceive them. Barth argues in this context: 'we give primary emphasis to the fact that ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people' (Barth, 1969: 10). By religious history, I mean the theory and practice of Sikh religion in north and south India, in the past and in the present. I argue further that not only the dialectic between the social and the religious identities but

between the past and the present also sustain the identity of the Sikhs, and Sikhi(sm) in the Deccan.

Going by oral history, the most significant element in their social identity is being the descendants of the soldiers of Lahori Fauj of Ranjit Singh. They take pride in it since he was no ordinary king but Sher-e-Punjab, the lion of Punjab who extended the boundaries of the Sikh empire from Kashmir to Afghanistan and down to Satluj, with capital at Lahore. The other element being that their ancestors were no *looteras* (plunderers) and marauders who came to the Deccan for selfish gains but to assist the Nizam's administration and police to tame the notorious bands of Arabs and Rohillas. They were there to establish the law and order. They not only neutralised the miscreants but provided security to the palaces and processions of the Nizam, a duty entrusted to the sincere and trustworthy soldiers who had the confidence of the royal family. The security of treasury and collection of revenue also were assigned to the Sikh Force, their ancestors.

The formation of the Sikh Force under Nazim-i-Jami'at-i-Sikhan is surely an important milestone in concretising their social identity. It was not only a source of employment to the then incumbents but also their progeny. Their sons were given a stipend on attaining the age of five years. They were then admitted to the police school. The successful pass outs were given regular employment in the Sikh Force on attaining the age of 18 years. Such an ensured employment to their sons tells the story of their power and prestige in Deccan society. The patronage of Maharaja Chandu Lal, of course, added additional support, domination and prestige to the Sikhs. It is plausible, contrary to popular perception, that under turbulent conditions prevailing in the state then, Chandu Lal would like to strengthen himself by having a contingent of fiery soldiers on his side.[9] Wood notes: 'Yet, given the frayed nature of Hyderabadi politics in the first half of the nineteenth century, and given the almost total absence of any rule of law, Chandu Lal's private army of Sikhs was simply another aspect of his genius for self-preservation' (Wood, 1981: 375). Thus, as personnel of the Sikh Force, it was obligatory for them to maintain their complete Sikh form or identity and also remain true to their religion.

The Arabs strongly resented the patronage given to the Jami'at-i-Sikhan and protested to the Nizam. He is believed to have appeased them saying that in case of an emergency while they (Arabs) would take time looking for their dress and weapons, soldiers of the Sikh Force are ever ready who sleep with their weapons on them. They are there for this reason and for their assistance. To make his point clear and convincing to the Arabs, the Nizam is said to have arranged a mock fight between the two forces. The warrior's agility and strength of the Sikh soldiers gave credence to the Nizam's argument. The Arabs cut a sorry figure in the contest but their resentment against Sikhs remained and brewed latently. Later, it manifested in clashes and skirmishes between them in the city of Hyderabad itself. *The Chronology of Modern Hyderabad* records that on 16th October 1829, on Friday: 'Owing to strained feelings, a fight ensues between the Sikhs and the Arabs near Maharaja Chandulal Bahadur's residence' (1954: 192). And, five days later on 21 October, the Wednesday, 'By the orders of

Maharaja Chandulal, a reconciliation is brought about between the Sikhs and the Arabs.' (ibid: 192). The reconciliation did not last long. The two groups clashed again on May 1, 1831 that led to many casualties on both sides (ibid: 199). Balchand and his son died of wounds ten days later (11 May) and former's wife 'becomes Sati on the funeral pyre of her husband' (ibid: 199).

A manifest conflict with the entrenched (rival) force and State patronage concretised the Sikh identity. Moreover, if the Dakhani Sikhs are descendants of the soldiers of Lahori Fauj, there remains least doubt about their Sikh credentials since that army was more likely to be imbued with the colour of theory and practice of the Sikh religion, given the religious devoutness of Ranjit Singh.[10] On the other hand, if they are the descendants of Hazoori Sikhs (Nihang and Singh, 2008), who accompanied Guru Gobind Singh to Nanded, the chances of their being coloured with Sikhism are still more potent. Finally, if their ancestors were Sikhs scattered around in the Deccan, their enrolment in the Sikh Force could be possible only if they were true to their religion in form and spirit. Even if they were lax in keeping their complete form and distinct identity before recruitment, it must have induced them to be more particular about these, post-employment since a job in the police force then must have been a great attraction. Sikh religious identity had to be maintained in the Sikh Force vis-a-vis other forces of the Arabs, Yemeni, Turks, Afghans and Africans. Thus, Jami'at-i-Sikhan must have contributed directly to the construction and sustenance of the Sikh soldiers' religious and social identity.

What Garfinkel calls identity constancy by asking 'what are the conditions under which the person's interpreter regards the person as the same,' (Garfinkel, 2006: 151) I suggest that the Dakhani Sikhs have maintained a continuity with their past identity that remains functional. The correspondence of the social space with the physical or geographical space are going a long way in marking them off from other communities and concretising their own identity – social and religious. They still enjoy social esteem from the local people even if the affluent fellow Punjabi Sikhs disown them. They maintain religious markers, especially the flowing beard and turban without exception. And, with Sikhs, the social and the religious are inseparable. I would rather re-verse Niharranjan Ray's saying that howsoever engrossed a Sikh may find himself/herself in matters of day to day life in the present day market society, s/he is never oblivious of the 'religious'.

The Dakhani Sikhs are, however, actively consolidating their Dakhani identity through their hold on Takht Hazoor Sahib (Nanded) that others are trying to capture. This gurdwara has its own tradition and distinct practices different from the prescriptions of the SGPC. For instance, its *Jathedar* is a Dakhani Sikh who should be a bachelor. The sanctum sanctorum adorned by the two granths, Guru Granth and the Dasam Granth are held in equal respect. Each evening the weapons belonging to Guru Gobind Singh, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Akali Phoola Singh and Baba Deep Singh are displayed individually to the devotees inside the gurdwara punctuated by *jaikaras – Bole so nihal, Sat Sri Akal*. A ram is also sacrificed within the gurdwara premises that does not happen anywhere else especially in gurdwaras under the management of SGPC. These

Sikhs want to maintain their own, and their institution's identity distinct from its northern counterpart. Nihang and Singh suggest: '…an undivided loyalty to Guru Gobind Singh, the Hazoori Sikhs take a radically different approach from many of their Punjabi brethren in their understanding of what it means to be a Sikh,…' (Nihang and Singh, 2008: iv). And, that 'they alone have preserved the bonafide, unalloyed traditions imparted' by the Guru (ibid: vi). These are the sources of inspiration for all Dakhani Sikhs and they try to emulate them in their daily lives in whichever way they can. The *People of India* volume too notes that, 'The community's self-perception at the regional level is high' (Singh, 2003: 475).

The identity of the Dakhani Sikhs at present is seemingly disjointed. The people of their own 'origin' (if from Punjab) and religion, the Punjabi Sikhs consider them 'duplicate' for not knowing the Gurmukhi language. They are also called *kachae* Sikhs for being loose with *rehat*. There is, of course, a strong difference of class between them as they are relatively poor and humble, engaged in petty business and employed at low level jobs. The Punjabi Sikhs are rich and affluent. The two communities are socially both distinct and distant. There are no social relations between them.[11] However, when it comes to celebrate gurpurabs, the days of religious significance, they come together but there too division of celebrations is distinct and demarcated. For instance, if the Gowliguda gurdwara, the oldest one in Hyderabad under the management of Dakhani Sikhs celebrates gurpurab of the last guru, the Singh Sabha gurdwara under Punjabi Sikhs celebrates that of the first guru.

Spirit of militancy/Love for weapons

Of all the Sikh gurus, the tenth guru is notable for his militant character not only because he fought about two dozen battles in his relatively short lifespan but he instilled the spirit of militancy in the Sikhs and the khalsa often conveyed through a dictum: *Chirion se mein baaz ladaun tabhe Gobind Singh naam kahaun*. Literally, I am called Guru Gobind Singh because I train sparrows to fight against the falcon. The spirit of militancy and love for weapons go together in the guru's philosophy of social change and social order. He tried to take out the fear of death from the Sikhs and inculcated in them a spirit to use weapons for dharma, a just cause. Kapur Singh writes: 'From 1687 to 1695, the Guru was openly providing spiritual refreshment and encouragement to people around him to arouse their self-respect and spirit of independence, which resulted in a prolonged insurrection against the imperial authority' (Singh, 1989: 204).

In the words of Puran Singh: 'Guru Gobind Singh's religion cannot live on this earth without the sparkle of the sword... war is a cruel thing, but what is life when viewed from the stand point of Not-god, but an endless cruelty, one crushing the other? So, it is the sword that is capable of destroying darkness and this has to be gone through' (Singh, 1981: 207). War is creative of great nobilities; thus, when viewed in the whole scheme of things, it has a purpose. Without passing through it (war), thrust on them as it was, the Gurus could not

have created an ever-inspiring New Order for the Khalsa (ibid: 214). Kapur Singh authenticates:

> ... it (sword) is, by ancient tradition and association, a typical weapon of offence and defence and, hence, a fundamental right of the free man, a sovereign individual to wear it… It follows from this that the measure of freedom to possess and wear arms by an individual is the precise measure of his freedom and sovereignty. Since a member of the Khalsa Brotherhood is pledged not to accept any alien restrictions on his civic freedom, he is enjoined to insist on and struggle for his unrestricted right to wear and possess arms of offence and defence (Singh, 1989: 107-8).

The order of Khalsa is meant to protect the weak and the oppressed, ever ready to fight against injustice - *Khalsa soi jo nitt kare jang*. These, in fact, are the civic soldiers who are given the responsibility of radical social change and social order. The rise of the guru is described by Puran Singh in the following words:

> Guru Gobind Singh is the new *Gita* of India in himself and by himself. He is a modern type of prophet… 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... On the saddle he is in unbroken union with *Akal*, the Timeless. He is the ancient *Brahmjnani* who champions the cause of the poor, fights in open battle, sacrifices his all (Singh, 1981: 303-04).

The Sikhs no doubt worship the weapons as the last guru addressed them 'our *pirs'*. '*Shastarmala*' in *Dasam Granth* gives the typology of weapons used during the war along with their legends and history. But their valorisation was not for their being an end-in-itself but as means-to-an-end. Puran Singh writes: 'The rifle, the sword, the pistol, the *chakkar* (quoit), the bow, the arrow are only physical symbols of the burning, dazzling idealism of the Sikh's inner fervent passion for the Guru' (ibid: 324). The sword of the Guru is 'not an instrument but mind made intense. It is the visible sign of a sensitive mind. *Kirpan* is His, not his' (Singh, 1976: 96). He also recited a long poem in praise of the sword in *Bachitarnatak*:

> Of that pure steel sword I seek protection. /Hail, hail to Thee, the ultimate cause of Creation! / Hail, hail to Thee, the Sustainer and Protector of the Universes. /Hail to Thee, my helper and support. /Glory be to the Sword! / Hallelujah to the sharp-edged Emblem of /Justice, Authority and Power (Singh, 1989: 112).

The ancestors of Dakhani Sikhs loved their weapons more than the present generation. *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism* notes: 'They not only adopted the five K's,…, but also carried five weapons each, viz. two pistols, a sword, a dagger and a musket or, later, rifle' (1998: 161). We may recall that the Guru had issued a *hukamnama* to that effect that an *amritdhari* Sikh must appear before him fully armed (see Kapur Singh). Each Dakhani Sikh household has a few swords that they take out at the time of *nagar kirtan jaloos.*[12] The celebration of Hola Mahalla is a big event for them that calls for the display of their weapons. At Halla Bol Chowk in Nanded, scenes of offense and defence are enacted that create a warlike situation. The young and old men brandishing weapons largely swords, charge fiercely in the streets of Nanded. The loud war cries by these men make the whole milieu intensely electrified. The level and scale of *gurtagaddi*[13] celebrations in 2008 were so massive and emotive that it not only unnerved the local populace and the administration but scared certain families so much that they left Nanded for Nizamabad.[14]

Such religious processions have definitely become more popular and ostentatious over the last few years. The element of flamboyance and glamourisation in religious celebrations has increased in the post Bluestar (June 1984) period and the all India Sikh killings in November 1984. It has become an index of their (Sikhs) strength and solidarity and a reaffirmation of their distinctive religious identity. The high-spirited enthusiasm and martial demeanours of the Sikhs in religious celebrations leave the local people simply wonderstruck. It is also a measure of their domineering effect (*bolbala*) in the present times. The Dakhani Sikhs narrate proudly that when no one was allowed to take out a procession on the day of U.S. President Clinton's visit to Hyderabad on March 24, 2000, they were not stopped from protesting against the killings of Sikhs at Chhatisinghpura in Kashmir.

The case of Gurdwara Maal Tekdi is also suggestive of their militant spirit and sense of seeking justice. The Sikh-Muslim tension had always been there from the early times of Maharaja Chandu Lal and erupted again in Nanded over the said gurdwara. A simple poser to the respondents - Is there any tension between the Sikhs and the Muslims? - invariably drew a positive response. Yes, when the Sikh-Muslim communalism was fanned, following the Maal Tekdi incident (Nishter, 2011). The Muslims solicited help from Rohilla and Arab bands to subdue the Sikhs. On the day of Bakr-Id, Muslims wanted to take out a procession on the gurdwara road in Nanded that led to a clash. The Sikhs not only stopped the procession but made them run away. 'Now none raises one's head,' they say. A senior respondent attests: '*Bhaga diye*. *Ab koi choon nahin karta.'* This incident is so fresh in their minds that they narrate it as if it is a matter of recent past. On inquiry: 'When did it happen?' The reply is '*peechhe hi*' (sometimes ago). On insisting, when? '*Thhodi der ki baat hai*' (It is only a short while ago). It was discovered later, that that incident took place in 1929.

Such a notion of living with respect and domineering effect (*bolbala*) is ever important to them in their day-to-day life. They still feel in them the elements of the Nizam's Sikh Force and tend to behave likewise. The past and the present thus reinforce each other to uphold the present image of the Dakhani Sikhs. It is

common utterance well summed up by a young man of Nanded in colloquial Punjabi: '*Singhan da dabdba poora hai ji*.' That, the Sikhs have maintained their prestige and domineering effect till date. It is a result of this continuity of the past practices and reputation, that Sikhs derive their honour and respect from the local people. Barth helps us understand it better: 'Since belonging to an ethnic category implies being a certain kind of person, having that basic identity, it also implies a claim to be judged, and to judge oneself, by those standards that are relevant to that identity' (Barth, 1969: 14).

That the Sikhs believe themselves to be people with fighting spirit has been perpetuated and 'authenticated' by the colonial rulers. They identified 'martial races' in India and Sikhs were one among them. Fox writes in a chapter 'A Martial Species' quoting R.W. Falcon:

> The Sikh is a fighting man and his fine qualities are best shown in the army, which is his natural profession. Hardy, brave, and of intelligence; too slow to understand when he is beaten; obedient to discipline; attached to his officers; and careless of caste prohibitions, he is unsurpassed as a soldier in the East…. The Sikh is always the same, ever genial, good-tempered and uncomplaining; as steady under fire as he is eager for a charge (Fox, 1987: 144).

Civic Soldiers

The Dakhani Sikhs have well understood the guru's lesson given to the first batch of *panj piaras* to recognise the sole authority and sovereignty of the Timeless (Akal), the True Lord (*sacha padshah*). The earthly kings are false and pretentious (*jhutthe padshah*). They inflict oppression and exploit subordinates and people alike. Thus, there is need to stand up against them and the khalsa is ordained to do so. The rebellion of certain risaldar(s) (head of an army unit) against the State of Hyderabad is an evidence of their having learnt that lesson well. They challenged the Nizam's command when it was not legitimate. One Asa Singh amongst them revolted since the salaries due to his soldiers were not paid for a few months. He took the state forces head on and got killed than cower down before them. At the Sikh Chhawniat now stands a Gurdwara Asa Singh Bagh Singh Shaheedan, a testimony to their ancestors' self-respect, honour and independence.

The case of Narayan Singh Morthad, in this respect, is also revealing and interesting. The village Morthad is about 50 kms from Nizamabad on the Nizamabad-Mancherial state highway. A large village now, at that time happened to be the area of operation of Narayan Singh, once a soldier of the Sikh Force. He too was disgruntled and rebelled against the Nizam. He started Robbin Hooding. He looted the wealthy and helped the poor and needy people. A nearby hillock where he camped is named Narayan Singh Pahar. There are stories about his strength and chivalry. People hold that he lived amongst tigers and one of their dens was his resting place. The state police was terribly scared

of him. Many expeditions were despatched to arrest or kill him but in vain. Finally, he was poisoned through a lady to whose house he used to visit for food. It is said that when he came to know of poisoning, he first killed her and later shot himself after taking a *chadar* (sheet of cloth) on himself as his coffin. People narrate that the dead Morthad was fired upon for an hour before 'capture'. His terror was so much that when his *chadar* fluttered, policemen ran for their lives. The Maoists of the region, however, keep him alive in their revolutionary songs.

The Dakhani Sikhs also derive their honour and self-respect from another important event in the lives of their ancestors. The respondents narrate proudly that their fore fathers were much concerned about their self-esteem. They came to the Deccan to salvage the Nizam's state from marauders. They assumed the role of civic soldiers restoring law and order there. It is interesting to note that two important aspects are deeply entrenched in their memory. First, that their ancestors came there at the Nizam's request. Second, they drew salary from the Punjab treasury. This means they were no *barkandaz*, the paid mercenaries. This seems in tune with the guru's legacy who fought numerous battles but none to encroach the territory and plunder other's wealth.

In the context of self-esteem, they are fond of narrating a story of their ancestors. Once, when the Nizam offered them the *jagir* (fiefdom) of Nirmal for their excellent services to the State of Hyderabad, they rolled the said *farman* (order of the government), inserted into the muzzle of a gun and blew that off, saying: 'We get salary from our Maharaja (Ranjit Singh). He is our lord. Who is he (Nizam) to give us *jagir*?' The respondents maintain that until the death of the Maharaja, salary of the Sikh Troops was paid from the Punjab treasury since 'the economic condition of the Nizam was not sound.' Each and every Dakhani Sikh, rich and poor alike, narrate this incident verbatim and feel proud that the Sikhs have maintained their glory till this day.

They have a large storehouse of stories and anecdotes about their ancestor' achievements since they were entrenched in state administration. Not some but numerous respondents reminisce the heroic feats of their ancestors that may be likened to the fear that Hari Singh Nalwa, a general in the army of Ranjit Singh, was to the Pathans in Punjab. They boast of Sikh chivalry in one voice: 'The presence of not only a soldier but an ordinary Sikh in the village was enough to deter any miscreant or criminal.' Further, 'A Sikh paying social visit to a house would make news in the village and people would surmise what wrong had been done by the family that a Sikh (Force) had come to them.' Such awe and fear of the Sikhs is still fresh in local peoples' memory.

For Dharma

Dharma in Indian philosophy is not an equivalent of religion. It means various things to different people. In the context of Sikhism, it means ethical living (Trilochan Singh), righteousness (Jodh Singh), Truth (Talib), law (Sekhon) and to Ujjal Singh, enforcement of social justice. For the last writer it means negatively social discrimination, disparities and oppression, subjugation to

foreign rule and caste domination as well. Guru Nanak's vision of a society based on equality of classes and absence of caste is essential and every person must be doing labour for their own living. No one is discriminated against on basis of religion or community. Guru Gobind Singh carrying forward Nanak's mission proclaims in *Bachittar Natak*:

> For this Have I come into this world;
> The Lord God sent me for the protection of Truth (Dharma);
> That I spread the Truth everywhere,
> And defeat and destroy the wicked and evil-doers,
> For this mission have I taken birth,
> Let all holy men know this in their inmost minds;
> To spread the truth, to uphold holy men,
> And to extirpate the wicked root and branch (Talib, 1967: 50).

Such a project of establishing dharma may be accomplished through the sovereign Khalsa who takes command from none other than the Akalpurakh (God). It will eliminate the evil root and branch even if that requires the use of weapons. The guru himself has held the use of weapons just in the last resort.

The Dakhani Sikhs at least are fighting against the most pernicious element of caste in Indian society including class in social relations and marital alliances. It is interesting to know that most respondents do not even know what is their caste or *gotra* (clan name or surname) even if they call themselves Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Scheduled Castes (SC), often constrained by the institutional framework of acquiring personal information of the applicant. The case of a 35 years old respondent in the Sikh Village (Hyderabad) is representative of the community's orientation to such issues. He was asked to name his caste or *gotra* as is the wont of a sociologist. He drew blank. On insistence, he took me to his aunt's house next door. He asked: '*Chachi apni jaat kya hai ya? Apna gotra kya hai*?' Aunty, what is our caste? Our *gotra*? The elderly lady scratched her head and recalled that her husband was called Kohli (a khatri *gotra*). With regard to marriage, an 80 years old retired police officer at Nanded clarified: 'At the time of marriage we bother neither about *gotra* (clan name) nor *jati* (caste) but only religion, and that they should be *amritdhari*.'

The Dakhani Sikhs feel proud still that their ancestors brought peace and prosperity to the state by helping the economically starved and administratively weak state of the Deccan. Their ancestors tamed the marauding bands of Arabs and Rohillas who had become law unto themselves. The confidence generated in the state administration by the Sikh Force helped them win respect of the local people too. Their sincerity and commitment to duty became so entrenched in the peoples' minds that even today they command respect from them for their up righteousness. As Sikhs, they always lend a helping hand to those who need assistance. A former professor of Political Theory, Javeed Alam, residing at Hyderabad remarks: 'Whenever there is need for help, a Sikh neighbour is the first one to come forward.'[15]

It is noteworthy about them that people in their neighbourhood feel safe and women passengers feel secure in their vehicles, be it a three-wheeler or a taxi. The parents too prefer to put up their daughters in the paying guest accommodation of Dakhani Sikhs in Ameerpet (Hyderabad), an area of their concentration. Thus, for local people their poverty does not come in the way of social respect for them. The Sikhs have the reputation of upholding dharma.[16] The commitment they make to someone is not violated irrespective of their personal loss or gain[17] and the money they lend never gets forfeited even today.[18] This definitely is in partial, if not full, fulfilment of the Sikh *rehat maryada*. Barth explicates the perpetuation of Pathan identity on a more individual basis: 'As money-lenders and as night watchmen, Pathans can defend and capitalize on their virtues as fearless, independent, and dominant persons,…' (Barth, 1969: 129). He continues: 'On a deeper level, it confirms basic premises of Pathan life: the wealth is not for amassing, but for use and is basically without importance, that only the weak man is attached to property and makes himself dependent on it, that the strong man bases his position on qualities within himself and *people's recognition of these qualities*, and not on control of people by the control of objects' (emphasis added) (ibid, 1969: 121).

The above mentioned examples of everyday experience reflecting social esteem keep the Dakhani Sikhs going as Sikhs. Schutz remarks, 'The everyday world of common-sense objects and practical acts is, the paramount reality in human experience - paramount in the sense that it is the world in which we are most solidly rooted, whose inherent actuality we can hardly question (however much we may question certain portions of it), and from whose pressures and requirements we can least escape' (Schutz, 1982: 226).

[An earlier version of the paper was presented at an international seminar on ***Legacy of Guru Gobind Singh*** by Bhai Vir Singh Sadan, New Delhi and India International Centre, New Delhi on 24 - 26 November 2016.]

Notes

1. Given the homogeneity of universe/sample there are hardly significant variations amongst Dakhani Sikhs at different locations in Telengana, Bidar and Nanded.

2. The elderly women are under the influence of local culture and tradition. The case of a Dakhani Sikh woman wearing sari, supporting a large red *bindi* on forehead, believing in Hindu deities and Sikh religion as well is interesting. (For details see Singh 2018, notes 1: 160).

3. *Amrit* is sweetened water stirred with double-edged sword (*khanda*) or *kirpan* for initiating a neophyte into the Sikh religion. One becomes *khalsa singh* or an *amritdhari* who must have five Ks on her and recite five *banis* daily.

4. These are the icons of Hindi cinema popular with youth especially.

5. It is true of Axomiya Sikhs too in Assam settled there since 1820. (Singh 2018, ch. 3: 57-75) For instance, they get up at will during *akhand path* (uninterrupted recitation of Guru Granth).

6. The Punjabi Sikhs labelling them duplicate/*kachae* Sikhs does not mean they are strict followers of *rehat*. Jutt Sikhs are least on the scale while khatri Sikhs are particular about their form but the former consider themselves superior to all castes in Punjab and outside.

7. The Axomiya Sikhs are also called 'duplicate' by the Punjabi Sikhs there. It is also true of Bihari or Agarahari Sikhs in Kolkata. See Himadri Banerjee, *The Other Sikhs: A View from Eastern India* Volume 1. Delhi: Manohar, 2007. Also see Nanjin Islam, 'Negotiating Borders: Community and the Dynamics of Punjabi and Bihari-Sikh Relations in Kolkata', *Man In India,* 92 (1), 2012, pp. 55-76.

8. The airing of Punjabi programmes in numerous television channels showing films and popular songs clearly reflect the popularity of *mona* culture amongst the heroes and singers. Lately, the turban wearing has become fashionable.

9. For Chandu Lal see Singh 2018: 17-21.

10. For instance, Ranjit Singh called his regime *Sarkar-i-Khalsa* not in his name, and wanted himself to be addressed as *Bhai Sahib* (elder brother) not as Maharaja. He accepted flogging when jathedar of Akal Takht pronounced punishment for his allegedly immoral conduct.

11. The Punjabi Sikhs have a hardbound 146 pages directory with glossy quality paper called *Twin Cities Sikh and Punjabi Directory* published by Singh Sabha Sahayak Society, Hyderabad (2008). It gives the residential and business addresses of the heads of households, names of their children, occupation, age, blood group and 'mobile & phone numbers'. Dakhani Sikhs are not included in it and they have none of their own.

12. It refers to the enthronement of Granth Sahib as living guru. The central government released grants to celebrate 300 years of *gurtagaddi* and facelift of the gurdwara Sach Khand in 2008.

13. *Nagar kirtan jaloos*, religious procession in the city is taken out on the eve of a *gurpurab* in which medium sized decorated motor vehicle carries Granth Sahib. The well-dressed *panj piaras* lead the procession, yet ahead of them are *gatka* players. The public follows chanting hymns from the Granth Sahib punctuated by *jaikaras,* the war cries. The procession traverses the main routes of the city, snacks and drinks are hosted by the shops/settlements all along the way.

14. Respondents at Nizamabad gave this information during the fieldwork in 2012.

15. Personal interview at Hyderabad on 20 May 2012.

16. There are numerous anecdotes about Sikhs releasing women, irrespective of their religion, to safety abducted by the invaders from the Frontier in the eighteenth century.

17. A respondent at Hyderabad informs that some Dakhani Sikhs are hired for a small daily pittance with food and drinks to take possession of a plot etc. in the city. When a commitment is made to a party, the other paying more is not entertained knowing well the price tags in Hyderabad. None dares to oppose them. (For details see Singh, 2008).

18. It is an interesting observation during fieldwork that small money Dakhani Sikhs lend to petty vendors on daily basis is never forfeited. Plausibly, it is due to the legacy of their ancestors in the Sikh Force who used to collect revenue from miscreants and defaulters.

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