

Bhai Sahib, Bhai Randhir Singh (1878 - 1961), whose original name before baptism and initiation into the Khalsa fold was Basant Singh, was born in the village of Narangwal in the Ludhiana District of Punjab on July 7, 1878, to a family of a very noble and devout heritage. His father, S. Natha Singh, was a learned scholar of Punjabi, Urdu, Persian and English, who initially worked as a District Inspector of Schools but later rose to the rank of a Judge in the High Court of the State of Nabha. As a Judge, he became well known for combining justice with mercy, compassion and humanity. His mother, Sardarni Punjab Kaur, was a direct seventh-generation descendant of a very devout, eminent, and saintly Gursikh, Bhai Bhagtu, a very distinguished disciple of Sahib Sri Guru Arjan Dev Ji and Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib. Thus, Bhai Randhir Singh inherited scholarship and strength of mind from his paternal side and qualities of piety and devotion from his maternal side.

He had most of his early schooling in Nabha and his higher education at the prestigious Government and Foreman Christian Colleges at Lahore (in 1896-1900 A.D.), which was, at that time, the capital of the undivided Punjab State. He was not only an intelligent and diligent student with respect to his scholastic pursuits, but was also a good sportsman, having once served as a Captain for the College hockey team. He had a prodigious memory, a fact clearly revealed from the way he has reproduced details of the happenings during his prison life. In his autobiographical letters from prison, he has narrated his long conversations with the jail authorities minutely and distinctly narrated. In his various books on Sikh theology he quotes very appropriate verses from the Gurbani freely and with apparent ease. He had a deep insight and scholarly expertise in Punjabi, Brij Bhasha of Sri Dasam Granth, Persian, Urdu and English. He even distinguished himself as an Urdu and Punjabi poet during his college days.

Even a cursory look at his life, as revealed from his autobiographical letters and related by his close prison and post-prison comrades, clearly shows that he was one of the very few Gursikhs of the century who had full and unfalterable conviction of his faith in the teachings of the Satguru, so much so that he staked his personal career, the safety and welfare of his wife and young children, his ancestral property and even his life in following the true path of Gurmat. He was one of the very few outstanding Sikhs of his time who, as one of the Panj Pyaras, blessed the so-called lowest caste people with the holy Amrit (Baptism of the Double Edged Sword). It may be recalled that those were the times when the Gurmat way of life had been almost completely overshadowed by Hindu orthodoxy or Brahminism. The Brahminic principle of untouchability regarding the low caste Hindus and Muslims had become ingrained in the minds of Sikhs to such an extent that the Sikhs would not even consider

taking part in the Amrit ceremony in their company.

Joining the Khalsa

Bhai Randhir Singh ji was one of the first few Sikhs of the 20th century who had the courage to be baptized along with a muslim, a well-known family of Maulvi Karim Baksh, whose Amrit Ceremony was arranged on a large Panthic scale on June 14, 1903. As a result, he was treated almost as an outcast by the Sikhs of his own village and even by some of his relatives; the priest of Sri Akal Takhat Sahib did not even let him offer Karah Prasad and do Kirtan there. However, he remained steadfast in practicing whatever was ordained at the Baptismal ceremony, as well as what he understood from the Holy Sikh Scriptures and authentic Sikh traditions. In fact, the practice and preaching of the Sikh Code of Conduct strictly in accordance with the true Gurmat became his passion in life. Though he belonged to an aristocratic family, his simple way of life, his devotion to Gurmat,

and his determination to live strictly in accordance with the Commandments of the Satguru, have very few parallels in the contemporary Sikh society.

Throughout his life, he stuck steadfastly to the Code of Conduct enunciated by the Tenth Guru, even at the risk of losing his health and life.

He had the firm belief that initiation into the Khalsa fold was not merely a ritual but meant a new birth into the Spirit of the Guru, provided that the ceremony is conducted strictly in accordance with the rules and procedures laid down by Guru Sahib. At the time of his own baptismal ceremony, a disturbing intrusion by an outsider caused confusion in his mind regarding the true Gurmantra. He felt that there was a Mystic Word prescribed as Gurumantra for the Sikhs which also formed the central theme of the Gurbani - a particular NAAM - and it was possible to repeat it with every breath. He firmly believed that only through constant repetition

of, and meditation on, this Mystic Word could complete self realization and oneness with God be attained.

Gurmantar

He, therefore, yearned ardently for getting the Gurmantra directly from Sri Guru Granth Sahib and was also confident that he would be blessed with it. He believed Sri Guru Granth Sahib to be the real embodiment of the Ten Gurus and, therefore, prayed only to Guru Sahib for the Bliss of the Holy Naam. With this objective in view, he made a prayerful vow to accept that holy word as the True Gurmantra that was indicated in the first hymn he read or heard in the Gurudwara on one particular morning. If there was any indication of the popularly known Divine Name of Waheguru through such words as Wah or Guru, he would accept Waheguru as the True Naam prescribed for the Sikhs as Gurmantra. How his prayer was accepted, in what a glorious way Guru Sahib blessed him with the

Gurmantra, and the technique of its constant repetition, is very beautifully narrated in his autobiographical letters:

As soon as I entered the Gurdwara and bowed before Guru Granth Sahib, these words were being recited:

**Ve-muhtaja Ve-parvah
Nanak Daas Kaho Gurvah.** (Asa M. 5:376)

Carefree and unconcerned is the Lord, Sayeth Nanak Speak GUR VAH.

The words Kaho Gurvah had such a magnetic effect on my mind that immediately my every nerve and pore in the body became imbued with the thrilled music of the Mystic Word Waheguru... To my great surprise I saw some unseen hand wave the chowri over Guru Granth Sahib and in between the canopy and the Guru Granth Sahib, there flashed forth a wave of light forming itself into the divine word Waheguru and moving in space throughout the

inside of the temple without any visible support.

After attaining the true Gurmat Naam from Sri Guru Granth Sahib, he became determined and anxious to attain the Named One, the Lord God Himself. His desire turned into a poignant thirst, and he took to repeating the Naam continuously without any feeling of fatigue or wavering of mind. After attaining the stage of self-realization during which he saw his own soul to be quite distinct from his body, his thirst for seeing the Light of God Himself increased manifold. On the auspicious day of Sahib Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji's Prakash Utsav, in the year 1905, God revealed himself in all His Perfect Resplendence to him in the silence of the midnight meditation which he describes in one of his autobiographical letters as follows:

God was now resplendently revealed within me... Ah! Blessed was my search today. I could see a sea of Divine Light flooding within

me and outside me in shimmering resplendence... The more I was absorbed in it, the more wonderful and sublimely dazzling spiritual phenomenon were seen by my inner eyes which cannot be expressed in the language of our physical and earthly world... I could see right through the roof and walls of the room in which I was sitting. Right through the sky I could see space beyond space, all crystal clear and bathed in purity. The whole of the universe was filled with incomprehensible light which was penetrating me and enfolding me. The music of His Divine Presence filled my heart with Blissful joy. I could see all this clearly and visibly in a wide awake condition...3

Becomes a Hermit

After these highly spiritual, mystical, and blissful experiences he resigned his Government job but did not become a hermit. He continued to tread the path of true Gumat which enjoins upon the Sikhs to continue to live in this world without being engrossed in it.

He continued to perform his duties to his family and society. He took the initiative in clearing the malpractices in the various historical Gurdwaras. As a reformer, he was not deterred by the strength of the vested interests involved in their management. Once, at Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib on a holy occasion, he did not allow the recitation of Gurbani by an unholy and apostate Ragi Jatha, without caring for danger to his life. Again at Anandpur Sahib Gurdwara, on the occasion of Hola Mohalla Celebration, he did not tolerate the malpractices and immoral activities of the powerful management. Risking his own life, he successfully fought against the administration. It was for such deeds of Gurdwara reform that he has been referred to as the pioneer of the Gurdwara Reform Movement. A reference to his services in this respect was also made in the Hukam Namah bestowed upon him from Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib in 1905 (Appendix A).

In 1914, when the British rulers razed the wall of the historical Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib in New Delhi to beautify the surroundings of the then newly built Parliament House, it was Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh ji who not only was the first to protest publicly against this desecration of the Holy Shrine, but also to announce his specific plans to spearhead the agitation until the razed wall was restored. He was also instrumental in organizing two large Panthic Conferences in this connection, at Patti in District Amritsar, and at Lahore, to pass the Resolutions condemning the British action, and demanding the restoration of the razed wall. These conferences were the first of their kind after the British occupation of Punjab. It may be mentioned here that the Chief Khalsa Diwan, the only major Panthic Organization at that time, had expressed its willingness to side with the British Government.⁴

Fight against repression & slavery

Although his mind was never in politics, as a true Gursikh who cannot accept slavery and repression, he, along with the Ghadarite emigrants from USA and Canada, became an active participant in the armed revolt against the British Government for the country's freedom. In fact, he was the only outstanding leader from Punjab who, along with his companions, was a participant in this revolt. It is worth noting here that the top Hindu leader of the Indian National Congress, M. K. Gandhi, opposed this revolt and declared his support to the British Government in their First World War efforts, saying, "Was it not the duty of the slave, seeking to be free, to make the master's need his opportunity?...it was our duty to win their help by standing them in their need."⁵ Earlier the so-called Punjab Kesri, Lala Lajpat Rai, called these Ghadarite emigrants fanatics and dangerous to the national cause.⁶

The revolt failed due to leakage of plans by traitors from within, and he and his companions were arrested on May 9, 1915 and tried in what is commonly known as the Second Lahore Conspiracy case. However, his love for the country's freedom arose solely from the ideals of the Sikh Dharma, and whatever he did for the country he did primarily as a true Gursikh and not merely as a political freedom fighter. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1916 and his property confiscated. He was only 38 years old with a wife and three young children. The eldest ten year old daughter could not bear this separation from her dear father and died within a month of his imprisonment. His son Balbir Singh was only six years old, and his daughter Daler Kaur was just two.⁷

During his prison term of over 15 years, he faced unprecedented sufferings. This was not for any political or personal reasons, but only for his determination to live strictly in accordance with the

Khalsa Code of Conduct made known to him at the time of initiation into the Khalsa fold. In Multan jail, one of the hottest places in India (now in W. Pakistan) with temperatures going up to 122°F in May and June, he remained without food and water continuously for 40 days. This was because he was not allowed to prepare his food himself according to the Gurmat principles and he would not take food prepared by non-Amritdharis. He was chained to iron gates in the open for many days to face the scorching heat of the sun and bear the brunt of hot winds.

At night he was put into a 6' x 4' cell without ventilation. This is only one instance of the many tortures inflicted upon him. He had to bear such terrible sufferings in prison that twice he was given up for dead even by members of his own family. Even after suffering such inhuman tortures, he remained steadfast in his beliefs and never once wavered from following strictly the Khalsa Code of Conduct. When the Khalsa Panth came to know of his tortuous

sufferings, the whole Panth observed February 1, 1923 as a special day of prayer for him in particular and for other suffering Sikh prisoners in general.

Prior to his release from prison in Lahore, the well-known Shaheed Bhagat Singh, who was waiting execution in the same prison, expressed a desire to have Bhai Sahib's darshan before his death. On being approached, Bhai Sahib refused to see him saying "...he has violated the basic tenets of Sikhism by shaving off his hair and hence I do not want to see him." Bhagat Singh was quick to express his repentance and also confessed that he, in fact, was an atheist at heart. He further told Bhai Sahib that even then, perhaps, he would have kept the Sikh appearance, but if he had done that he would have lost the friendship and sympathy of his Hindu comrades and would not have received so much publicity in the press. After a two hour meeting with Bhai Sahib, he became a true Sikh at heart and later went to the

gallows as a true believer in Sikhism.

Meeting with Bhagat Singh

Here I would like to put forth the Bhagat Singh's view. Based on the Bhagat Singh's and Bhai Randhir Singh's view one should decide who is right.

*(*Bhagat Singhs point of view: **Bhai Randhir Singh somehow managed to see Bhagat Singh in the condemned cell and tried to convince him about the existence of God, but failed. Baba lost his temper and said tauntingly: "You are giddy with fame and have developed and ago which is standing like a black curtain between you and the God." It was in reply to that remark that Bhagat Singh wrote the article "Why I am Atheist".***

NEW QUESTION HAS CROPPED UP. IS IT DUE TO vanity that I do not believe in the existence of an omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient God? I had never

imagined that I would ever have to confront such a question. But conversation with some friends has given me a hint that certain of my friends - if I am do not claiming too much in thinking them to be so - are inclined to conclude from the brief contact they have had with me, that it was too much on my part to deny the existence of God and that there was a certain amount of vanity that actuated my disbelief. Well, the problem is a serious one. I do not boast to be quite above these human traits. I am a man and nothing more. None can claim to be more. I also have this weakness in me. Vanity does form a part of my nature. Amongst my comrades I was called an autocrat. Even my friend Mr. B.K. Dutt sometimes called me so. On certain occasions I was decried as a despot. Some friends do complain, and very seriously too, that involuntarily thrust my opinions upon others and get my proposals accepted. That this is true up to a certain extent, I do not deny. This may amount to egotism. There is vanity in me inasmuch as our cult as opposed to

other popular creeds is concerned. But that is not personal. It may be, it is only legitimate pride in our cult and does not amount to vanity. Vanity, or to be more precise "Ahankar", is the excess of undue pride in one's self. Whether it is such an undue pride that has led me to atheism or whether it is after very careful study of the subject and after much consideration that I have come to disbelieve in God, is a question that I intend to discuss here. Let me first make it clear that egotism and vanity are two different things.

In the first place, I have altogether failed to comprehend as to how undue pride or vaingloriousness could ever stand in the way of a man in believing in God. I can refuse to recognise the greatness of a really great man, provided I have also achieved a certain amount of popularity without deserving it or without having possessed the qualities really essential or indispensable for the same purpose. That much is conceivable. But in what way can a man

believing in God cease believing due to his personal vanity? There are only two ways. The man should either begin to think himself a rival of God or he may begin to believe himself to be God. In neither case can he become a genuine atheist. In the first case he does not even deny the existence of his rival.

In the second case as well, he admits the existence of a conscious being behind the screen guiding all the movements of nature. It is of no importance to us whether he thinks himself to be that supreme being or whether he thinks the supreme being or whether he thinks the supreme conscious being to be somebody apart from him means an atheist. Well, here I am. I neither belong to the first category nor to the second. I deny the very existence of that Almighty Supreme Being. Why I deny it, shall be dealt with later on. Here I want to clear one thing, that it is not vanity that has actuated me to adopt the doctrines of atheism. I am neither a rival a rival nor an incarnation, nor the Supreme Being Himself. One

point is decided, that it is not vanity that has led me to this mode of thinking. Let me examine the facts to disprove this allegation.

According to these friends of mine I have grown vainglorious perhaps due to the undue popularity gained during the trials - both Delhi Bomb and Lahore Conspiracy Cases. Well, let us see if their premises are correct. My atheism is not of so recent origin. I had stopped believing in God when I was an obscure young man, of whose existence my above-mentioned friends were not even aware. At least a college student cannot cherish any sort of undue pride which may lead him to atheism. Thought a favourite with some professors and disliked by certain others. I was never an industrious or a studious boy. I could not get any chance of indulging in such feelings as vanity. I was rather a boy with a very shy nature, who had certain pessimistic dispositions about the future career. And in those days, I was not a perfect atheist.

My grandfather under whose influence I was brought up is an orthodox Arya Samajist. An Arya Samajist is anything but an atheist. After finishing my primary education I joined the D.A.V. School of Lahore and stayed in its Boarding House for full one year. There, apart from morning and evening prayers, I used to recite "Gayatri Mantra" for hours and hours. I was perfect devotee in those days. Later on I began to live with my father. He is a liberalinas much as the orthodoxy of religions is concerned. It was through his teachings that I aspired to devote my life to the cause of freedom. But he is not an atheist. He is a firm believer. He used to encourage me for offering prayers daily. So this how I was brought up. In the Non-Cooperation days I joined the National College. It was there that I began to think liberally and discuss and criticise all the religious problem, even about God. But still I was a devout believer. By that time I had begun to preserve the unshorn and unclipped long hair but I could never believe in the mythology and doctrines of Sikhism

or any other religion. But I had a firm faith in God's existence.

Later on I joined the revolutionary party. The first leader with whom I came in contact, though not convinced, could not dare to deny the existence of God. On my persistent inquiries about God, he used to say: "Pray whenever you want to." Now this is atheism less courage required for the adoption of that creed. The second leader with whom I came in contact was a firm believer. Let me mention his name-respected Comrade Shachindra Nath Sanyal, now undergoing life transportation in connection with the Kakori Conspiracy Case. From the very first page of his famous and only book, *Bandi Jivan* (or *Incarcerated Life*), the Glory of God is sung vehemently. On the last page of the second part of that beautiful book, his mystic-because of vedantism-praises showered upon God form a very conspicuous part of his thoughts. "The Revolutionary" distributed throughout India on January 28th, 1925, was according to the

prosecution story the result of his intellectual labour. Now, as is inevitable in the secret work the prominent leader expresses his own views which are very dear to his person, and the rest of the workers have to acquiesce in them, in spite of differences which they might have. In that leaflet one full paragraph was devoted to praise the Almighty and His rejoicings and doing. That is all mysticism. What I wanted to point out was that the idea of disbelief had not even germinated in the revolutionary party. The famous Kakori martyrs-all four of them-passed their last days in prayers. Ram Prasad Bismil was an orthodox Arya Samajist. Despite his wide studies in the field of socialism and communism, Rajen Lahiri could not suppress his desire of reciting hymns of the Upanishads and the Gita. I saw only one man amongst them, who never prayed and used to say: "Philosophy is the outcome of human weakness or limitation of knowledge." He is also undergoing a sentence of transportation for life.

But he also never dared to deny the existence of God.

Up to that period I was only a romantic idealist revolutionary. Up till then we were to follow. Now come the time to shoulder the whole responsibility. Due to the inevitable reaction for some time the very existence of the party seemed impossible. Enthusiastic comrades - nay, leaders-began to jeer at us. For some time I was afraid that some day I also might not be convinced of the futility of our own programme. That was a turning point in my revolutionary career. "Study" was the cry that reverberated in the corridors of my mind. Study to enable yourself with arguments in favour of your cult. I began to study. My previous faith and convictions underwent methods alone which was so prominent amongst our predecessors, was replaced by serious ideas. No more mysticism, no more blind faith. Realism became our cult. Use of force justifiable when resorted to as a matter of terrible necessity:

nonviolence as policy indispensable for all mass movements. So much about methods. The most important thing was the clear conception of the ideal for which we were to fight. As there were no important activities in the field of action I got ample opportunity to study various ideals of the world revolution. I studied Bakunin, the anarchist leader, something of Marx, the father of communism, and much of Lenin, Trotsky and others-the men who had successfully carried out a revolution in their country. They were all atheists. Bakunin's God and State, thought only fragmentary, is an interesting study of the subject. Later still I came across a book entitled Common Sense by Nirlamba Swami, It was only a sort of mystic atheism. This subject became of utmost interest to me. By the end of 1926 I had been convinced as to the baselessness of the theory of existence of an almighty supreme being who created, guided and controlled the universe. I had given out this disbelief of mine. I began discussion on the subjects with my

friends. I had become a pronounced atheist. But what it meant will presently be discussed.

In May 1927 I was arrested at Lahore. The arrest was a surprise. I was quite unaware of the fact that the police wanted me. All of a sudden, while passing through a garden, I found myself surrounded by police. To my own surprise, I was very clam at that time. I did not feel any sensation, nor did I experience any excitement. I was taken into police custody. Next day I was taken to the Railway Police lock-up where I was to pass full one month. After many day's conversation with the police officials I guessed that they had some information regarding my connection with the Kakori party and my other activities in connection with the revolutionary movement. They told me that I had been to Lucknow while the trial was going on there, that I had negotiated a certain scheme about their rescue, that the after obtaining their approval, we had procured

some bombs, that by way of test one of the bombs was thrown in the crowd on the occasion of Dussehra 1926. They further informed me, in my interest, that if I could give any statement throwing some light on the activities of the revolutionary party, I was not to be imprisoned but on the contrary set free and rewarded, even without being produced as an approver in the court. I laughed at the proposal. It was all humbug. People holding ideas like ours do not throw bombs on their on innocent people. One fine morning Mr. Newman, the then Senior Superintendent of C.I.D., came to me. And after much sympathetic talk with me, imparted - to him the extremely sad-news that if I did not give any statement as demanded by them, they would be forced to send me up for trial for conspiracy to wage war in connection with Kakari Case and for brutal murders in connection with Dussehra bomb outrage. And he further informed me that they had evidence enough to get me convicted and hanged. In those day I believed - through I was quite

innocent - the police could do it if they desired. That very day certain police officials began to persuade me to offer my prayers to God regularly, both the times. Now I was an atheist. I wanted to settle for myself whether it was in the days of peace and enjoyment alone that I could boast of being an atheist or whether during such hard times as well, I could stick to those principles of mine. After great consideration I decided that I could not lead myself to believe in and pray to God. No, I never did. That was the real test and I came out successful. Never for a moment did I desire to save my neck at the cost of certain other things. So I was a staunch disbeliever; and have ever since been. It was not an easy job to stand that test. 'Belief' softens the hardships, even can make them pleasant. In God man can find very strong consolation and support. Without Him man has to depend upon himself. To stand upon one's own legs amid storms and hurricanes is not a child's play. At such testing moments, vanity-if-any- evaporates and man cannot dare to

defy the general beliefs. If he does, then we must conclude that he has got certain other strength than mere vanity. This is exactly the situation now. Judgement is already too well known. Within a week it is to be pronounced. What is the consolation with the exception of the idea that I am going to sacrifice my life for a cause? A God-believing Hindu might be expecting to be reborn as a king, a Muslim or a Christian might dream of the luxuries to be enjoyed in paradise and the reward he is to get for his suffering and sacrifices. But, what am I to expect? I know the moment under my feet, that will be the final moment-that will be the last moment. I, or to be more precise, my soul as interpreted in the metaphysical terminology shall all be finished there. Nothing further. A short life of struggle with no such magnificent end, shall in itself be the reward, if I have the courage to take it in that light. That is all. With no selfish motive or desire to be awarded here or hereafter, quite disinterestedly, have I devoted my life to the cause of independence,

because I could not do otherwise. The day we find a great number of men and women with this psychology, who cannot devote themselves to anything else than the service of mankind and emancipation of the suffering humanity, that day shall inaugurate the era of liberty. Not to become a king, nor to gain any other rewards here, or in the next birth or after death in paradise, shall they be inspired to challenge the oppressors, exploiters, and tyrants, but to cast off the yoke of serfdom from the neck of humanity and to establish liberty and peace shall they tread this-to their individual selves perilous and to their noble selves the only glorious imaginable-path. Is the pride in their noble cause to be misinterpreted as vanity? Who dares to utter such an abominable epithet? To him I say either he is a fool or a knave. Let us forgive him for he cannot realise the depth, the emotion, the sentiment and the noble feelings that surge in that heart. His heart is dead as a mere lump of flesh, his eyes are weak, the evils of other interests

having been cast over them. Self-reliance is always liable to be interpreted as vanity. It is sad and miserable but there is no help.

You go and oppose the prevailing faith, you go and criticise a hero, a great man who is generally believed to be above criticism because he has thought to be infallible, the strength of your argument shall force the multitude to decry you as vainglorious. This is due to the mental stagnation. Criticism and independent thinking are the two indispensable qualities of a revolutionary. Because Mahatamaji is great, therefore none should criticise him. Because he has risen above, therefore everything he says-may be in the field of Politics or Religion, Economics or Ethics-is right. Whether you are convinced or not you must say: "Yes, that's true". This mentality does not lead towards progress. It is rather too obviously reactionary.

Because our forefathers had set up a faith in some supreme being-the Almighty God-therefore, any man

who dares to challenge the validity of that faith, or the very existence of that supreme being, he shall have to be called an apostate, a renegade. If his arguments are too sound to be refuted by counter-arguments and spirit too strong to be cowed down by the threat of misfortunes that may befall him by the wrath of the Almighty, he shall be decried as vainglorious, his spirit to be denominated as vanity. Then, why do waste time in this vain discussion? Why try to argue out the whole thing? This question is coming before the public for the first time, and is being handled in this matter of fact way for the first time, hence this lengthy discussion.

As for the first question, I think I have cleared that it is not vanity that has led me to atheism. My way of argument has proved to be convincing or not, that is to be judged by my readers, not me. I know in the present circumstances my faith in God would have made my life easier, my burden lighter, and my disbelief in Him has turned

all the circumstances too dry, and the situation may assume too harsh a shape. A little bit of mysticism can make it poetical. But I do not want the help of any intoxication to meet my fate. I am a realist. I have been trying to overpower the instinct in me by the help of reason. I have not always been successful in achieving this end. But man's duty is to try and endeavour, success depends upon chance and environments.

As for the second question that if it was not vanity, then there ought to be some reason to disbelieve the old and still prevailing faith of the existence of God. Yes, I come to that now. Reason there is.

According to me, any man who has got some reasoning power at his command always tries to reason out his environments. Where direct proofs are lacking philosophy occupies the important place. As I have already stated, a certain revolutionary friend used to say that philosophy is the outcome of human weakness. When our

ancestors had leisure enough to try to solve out the mystery of this world, its past, present and the future, its whys and wherefores, they having been terribly short of direct proofs, everybody tried to solve the problem in his own way. Hence we find the wide differences in the fundamentals of various religious creeds, which sometimes assume very antagonistic and conflicting shapes. Not only the Oriental and Occidental philosophies differ, there are differences even amongst various schools of thought in each hemisphere. Amongst Oriental religions, the Moslem faith is not at all compatible with Hindu faith. In India alone Buddhism and Jainism are sometimes quite separate from Brahmanism, in which there are again conflicting faiths as Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharma. Charvak is still another independent thinker of the past ages. He challenged the authority of God in the old times. All these creeds differ from each other on the fundamental question; and everybody considers himself to be

on the right. There lies the misfortune. Instead of using the experiments and expressions of the ancient Savants and thinkers as a basis for our future struggle against ignorance and to try to find out a solution to this mysterious problem, we lathargical as we have proved to be, raise the hue and cry of faith, unflinching and unwavering faith to their versions and thus are guilty of stagnation in human progress.

Any man who stands for progress has to criticise, disbelieve and challenge every item of the old faith. Item by item he has to reason out every nook and corner of the prevailing faith. If after considerable reasoning one is led to believe in any theory or philosophy, his faith is welcomed. His reasoning can be mistaken, wrong, misled, and sometimes fallacious. But he is liable to correction because reason is the guiding star of his life. But mere fait and blind faith is dangerous: it dulls the brain, and makes a man reactionary. A man who claims to be a realist has to

challenge the whole of the ancient faith. If it does not stand the onslaught of reason it crumbles down. Then the first thing for him is to shatter the whole down and clear a space for the erection of a new philosophy. This is the negative side. After it begins the positive work in which sometimes some material of he old faith may be used for the purpose of reconstruction. As far as I am concerned, let me admit at the very outset that I have not been able to study much on this pint. I had a great desire to study the Oriental philosophy but I could not get any chance or opportunity to do the same. But so far as the negative study is under discussion, I think I am convinced to the extent of questioning the soundness of the old faith. I have been convinced as to non-existence of a conscious supreme being who is guiding and directing the movements of nature. We believe in nature and the whole progressive movement aims at the domination of man over nature for his service. There is no conscious power behind it to direct. This is what our philosophy is.

As for the negative side, we ask a few question from the 'believers'. (1) If, as you believe, there is an almighty, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent God, who created the earth or world, please let me know why did he create it? This world of woes and miseries, a veritable, eternal combination of number-less tragedies: Not a single soul being perfectly satisfied. Pray, don't say that it is His Law. If he is bound by any law, he is not omnipotent. He is another slave like ourselves. Please don't say that it is his enjoyment. Nero burnt one Rome. He killed a very limited number of people. He created very few tragedies, all to his perfect enjoyment. And, what is his place in History? By what names do the historians mention him? All the venomous epithets are showered upon him. Pages are blackened with invective diatribes condemning Nero, the tyrant, the heartless, the wicked. One Changexkhan sacrificed a few thousand lives to seek pleasure in it and we hate the very name. Then, how are you

going to justify your almighty, eternal Nero, who has been, and is still causing numberless tragedies every day, every hour and every minute? How do you think to support his misdoings which surpass those of Changez every single moment? I say why did he create this world - a veritable hell, a place of constant and bitter unrest? Why did the Almighty create man when he had the power not to do it? What is the justification for all this? Do you say, to award the innocent sufferers hereafter and to punish the wrongdoers as well? Well, well: How far shall you justify a man who may dare to inflict wounds upon your body to apply a very soft and soothing ointment upon it afterwards? How far the supporters and organisers of the Gladiator institution were justified in throwing men before the half-starved furious lions to be cared for and well locked after if they could survive and could manage to escape death by the wild beasts? That is why I ask: Why did the conscious supreme being create this world and man in it? To

seek pleasure? Where, then, is the difference between him and Nero?

You Mohammadans and Christians: Hindu philosophy shall still linger on to offer another argument. I ask you, what is your answer to the above-mentioned question? You don't believe in previous birth. Like Hindus, you cannot advance the argument of previous misdoings of the apparently quite innocent suffers. I ask you, why did the omnipotent labour for six days to create the world though word and each day to say that all was well? Call him today. Show him the past history. Make him study the present situation. Let us see if he dares to say: "All is well."

From the dungeons of prisons, from the stores of starvation consuming millions upon millions of human beings in slums and huts, from the exploited labourers, patiently or say apathetically watching the procedure of their blood being sucked by the capitalist vampires, and the wastage of human energy that will make a man with the least

common sense shiver with horror, and from the preference of throwing the surplus of production in oceans rather than to distribute amongst the needy producers - to the palaces of kings built upon the foundation laid with human bones. . . let him see all this and let him say: "All is well." Why and wherefore? That is my question. You are silent. Alright then, I proceed.

Well, you Hindus, you say all the present sufferers belong to the class of sinners of the previous births. Good. You say the present oppressors were saintly people in their previous births, hence they enjoy power. Let me admit that your ancestors were very shrewd people, they tried to find out theories strong enough to hammer down all the efforts of reason and disbelief. But let us analyse how for this argument can really stand.

From the point of view of the most famous jurists, punishment can be justified only from three or four

ends, to meet which it is inflicted upon the wrongdoer. They are retributive, reformative and deterrent. The retributive theory is now being condemned by all the advanced thinkers. Deterrent theory is also following the same fate. Reformative theory is the only one which is essential and indispensable for human progress. It aims at returning the offender as a most competent and a peace-loving citizen to the society. But, what is the nature of punishment inflicted by God upon men, even if we suppose them to be offenders? You say he sends them to be born as a punishment to be 84 lakhs. I ask you: what is its reformative effect upon man? How many men have met you who say that they were born as a donkey in previous birth for having committed any sin? None. Don't quote your Puranas. I have noscope to touch your mythologies. Moreover, do you know that the greatest sin in this world is to be poor? Poverty is a sin, it is a punishment. I ask you how far would you appreciate a criminologist, a jurist or a legislator

who proposes such measures of punishment which shall inevitably force men to commit more offences? Had not your God thought of this, or he also had to learn these things by experience, but at the cost of untold sufferings to be borne by humanity? What do you think shall be the fate of a man who has been born in a poor and illiterate family of, say, a chamar or a sweeper? He is poor hence he cannot study. He is heated and shunned by his fellow human beings who think themselves to be his superiors having been born in, say, a higher caste. His ignorance, his heart towards society. Suppose he commits a sin, who shall bear the consequences? God, he or the learned ones of the society? What about the punishment of those people who were deliberately kept ignorant by the haughty and egotist Brahmins, and who had to pay the penalty by bearing the stream of being let (not lead) in their ears for having heard a few sentences of your Sacred Books of learning - the Vedas? If they committed any offence, who was to be responsible

for them and who was to invent the theories of the privileged ones; they justify their usurped power, riches and superiority by the help of these theories. Yes, it was perhaps Upton Sinclair that wrote at some place that just make a man a believer in immortality and then rob him of all his riches and possessions. He shall help you even in that ungrudgingly. The coalition among the religious preachers and possessors of power brought forth jails, gallows, knouts and these theories. I ask why your omnipotent God does not stop every man when he is committing any sin or offence? He can do it quite easily. Why did he not kill warlords or kill the fury of war in them and thus avoid the catastrophe hurled down on the head of humanity by the Great War? Why does he not just produce a certain sentiment in the mind of the British people to liberate India? Why does he not infuse the altruistic enthusiasm in the hearts of all capitalists to forego their rights of personal possessions of means of production and thus redeem the whole labouring community, nay,

the whole human society, from the bondage of capitalism? You want to reason out the practicability of socialist theory, I leave it for your almighty to enforce it. People recognise the merits of socialism inasmuch as the general welfare is concerned. They oppose it under the pretext of its being impracticable. Let the Almighty step in and arrange everything in an orderly fashion. Now don't try to advance round about arguments, they are out of order. Let me tell you, British rule is here not because God wills it, but because they possess power and we do not dare to oppose them. Not that it is with the help of God that they are keeping us under their subjection, but it is with the help of guns and rifles, bomb and bullets, police and militia, and our apathy, that they are successfully committing the most deplorable sin against society - the outrageous exploitation of one nation by another. Where is God? What is he doing? Is he enjoying all these woes of human race? A Nero, a Changez: Down with him.

Do you ask me how I explain the origin of this world and origin of man? Alright, I tell you, Charles Darwin has tried to throw some light on the subject. Study him. Read Soham Swami's Common Sense. It shall answer your question to some extent. This is a phenomenon of nature. The accidental mixture of different substances in the shape of nebulae produced this earth. When? Consult history. The same process produced animals and, in the long run, man. Read Darwin's Origin of Species. And all later progress is due to man's constant conflict with nature and his efforts to override it. This is the briefest possible explanation of the phenomenon. Your other argument may be just to ask why a child is born blind or lame if not due to his deeds committed in the previous birth? This problem has been explained away by biologists as a mere biological phenomenon. According to them the whole burden rests upon the shoulders of the parents who may be conscious or ignorant of their own deeds

which led to mutilation of the child previous to its birth.

Naturally, you may ask another question, though it is quite childish in essence. If no god existed, how did the people come to believe in him? My answer is clear and brief. As they came to believe in ghosts and evil spirits; the only difference is that belief in God is almost universal and the philosophy well developed. Unlike certain of the radicals I would not attribute its origin to the ingenuity of the exploiters who wanted to keep the people under their subjection by preaching the existence of a supreme being and then claiming an authority and sanction from him for their privileged positions, though I do not differ with them on the essential point that all faiths, religions, creeds and such other institutions became in turn the mere supporters of the tyrannical and exploiting institutions, men and classes. Rebellion against king is always a sin, according to every religion.

As regards the origin of God, my own idea is that having realised the limitation of man, his weaknesses and shortcomings having been taken into consideration, God was brought into imaginary existence to encourage man to face boldly all the trying circumstances, to meet all dangers manfully and to check and restrain his outbursts in prosperity and affluence. God, both will his private laws and parental generosity, was imagined and painted in greater details. He was to serve as a deterrent factor when his fury and private laws were discussed, so that man may not become a danger to society. He was to serve as a father, mother, sister and brother, friend and helper, when his parental qualifications were to be explained. So that when man be in great distress, having been betrayed and deserted by all friends, he may find consolation in the idea that an ever-true friend, was still there to help him, to support him and that he was almighty and could do anything. Really that was useful to the society

in the primitive age. The idea of God is helpful to man in distress. Society has to fight out this belief as well as was fought the idol worship and the narrow conception of religion. Similarly, when man tries to stand on his own legs and become a realist, he shall have to throw the faith aside, and to face manfully all the distress, trouble, in which the circumstances may throw him. That is exactly my state of affairs. It is not my vanity, my friends. It is my mode of thinking that has made me an atheist. I don't know whether in my case belief in God and offering of daily prayers which I consider to be most selfish and degraded act on the part of man, whether these prayers can prove to be helpful or they shall make my case worse still. I have read of atheists facing all troubles quite boldly; so am I trying to stand like a man with an erect head to the last, even on the gallows.

Let us see how I carry on. One friend asked me to pray. When informed of my atheism, he said:

"During your last days you will begin to believe." I said: "No, dear Sir, it shall not be. I will think that to be an act of degradation and demoralisation on my part. For selfish motives I am not going to pray." Readers and friends: Is this "vanity"? If it is, I stand for it.)

Released from Jail

Soon after his release in 1930, Bhai Sahib was honored by Sri Akal Taldit Sahib with a Hukumnamah and a robe of honor, recognizing his steadfastness in faith and selfless sacrifices (Appendix A). He is the second person to have been honored by Sri Akal Takht Sahib during this century, the other person being Baba Kharak Singh, the renowned Panthic leader of the late twenties. Afterwards, the other three Takhts also honored him in the same way, thus making him the only single person to have been honored from all the original four Takhts in the last hundred years of Sikh history. (Damdama Sahib was declared the fifth Takhat later). Robes of honor and a gold

medallion were also sent to him by the Sikhs of U.S.A. and Canada. He was selected as one of the Panj Pyaras to inaugurate the Kar Seva of the sarover of Gurdwara Tarn Taran Sahib, and to lay the foundation stones of the new buildings of the Gurdwaras at Panja Sahib and Shahidganj Nankana Sahib, besides those of the Bungas at Patna Sahib and Kavi Darbar Asthan at Paonta Sahib.

After his release from prison, he lived for over thirty years during which time he travelled throughout the country and propagated the true Gursikh way of life through Gurbani Kirtan and Paath. A large number of ardent seekers of the true path of Sikhism were drawn to him magnetically, and he directed them to and brought them in direct touch with the infinite wealth of Gurbani. In this way, the Akhand Kirtani Jatha came to be formed. According to him, the principles of life pointed out in Gurbani and prescribed in the Khalsa Code of Conduct are not merely ideals but

downright practical. He himself conformed to and lived in accordance with these principles in letter and spirit, even in the midst of the most unfavorable and tortuous circumstances of jail life. It is now a fact of history that his bold stand and endurance of untold sufferings for retaining the Sikh symbols in jail resulted in the amendment of the Jail Manual, which permits all the Sikh prisoners to wear Turban, Kachhehra and Karra in jail. Prior to that time, they were forced to wear caps and Longoties and were deprived of the Karra.

Writing Books

He wrote about two dozen books on Sikh theology, philosophy and the true Sikh way of life (Appendix B). Of these, the most well-known is his AUTOBIOGRAPHY, a collection of his letters written from prison during his sixteen years of imprisonment. This book reveals his personal spiritual experiences of the highest state of divine illumination. According to Bhai Sahib Vir Singh, these experiences "...will give

convincing testimony of the fact that our faith, the contemplation and remembrance of the divine Name has now been tested by an experiment in the crucible of his own self by a scholar educated and trained in Western lore."8 It also reveals that his whole life has been a saga of suffering in which he never for a moment left his deep faith and devotion to God and His Word.

With regard to his other books, it may safely be said that during the current century, he is perhaps the only writer on Sikh theology who has written comprehensively, and with the confidence arising out of first-hand personal experiences of the highest state of Divine illumination, on such subjects as Anhad Shabad (Unstruck Limitless Music), Gurmat Karam Philosophy (Law of Karma), Sach Khand Darshan (Vision of the Realm of the Truth), Jyot-Vigas (The Revelation of Light), Andithi Dunya (The Unseen World), etc. Dr. Tarlochan Singh rightly says that "...In his

writings we find the glow of his mystic experiences, his intellectual certainty and the metaphysical clarity of his theology."

The steadfastness of his character, conviction of his faith, and firmness in his allegiance to the high Sikh traditions are revealed from another remarkable incident in his life. Before his imprisonment, he was an intimate friend of Babu Teja Singh of Bhasaur and was also instrumental in establishing Panch Khalsa Diwan at Bhasaur in association with him. Babu Teja Singh was then quite a dynamic personality amongst the Sikhs and was a leading figure in the Singh Sabha resurgence. The Panthic Conference, where Bhai Sahib had taken Amrit along with Maulvi Karim Baksh and his family, was also organized by Babu Teja Singh. Hence both of them had become close friends. However, as Babu Teja Singh became a British Government loyalist, Bhai Sahib stopped working in association with him. During the period of Bhai

Sahib's internment, Babu Teja Singh had been excommunicated from the Panth.

Meeting with Babu Teja Singh

After Bhai Sahib's release, Babu Teja Singh tried to meet his old friend after twenty years and came to his house to resurrect their old friendship. Bhai Sahib was not there at that moment. When he came to know later of Babu Ji's visit, Bhai Sahib wrote him a letter politely declining to meet him. The contents of the letter are very moving and reveal the true personality of Bhai Sahib and his unshakable and abiding faith in the Sikh tenets, values and traditions. It is therefore considered worthwhile to reproduce the English translation of the same below:

"Babu Teja Singh ji, Waheguru ji ki Fateh. You, dear Sir, have come to see this humble servant of the Panth after one fifth of a century, i.e., 20 years. I was no less eager to have the chance of meeting with you and talking together. But I was

deeply pained when I learnt that you have been excommunicated from the Panth by a congregation at Sri Akal Takht.

What is even more distressing, you continue to disregard the authority of the Panth. It is now my request that you should be obedient to the Command of the Guru Panth and return to its shelter. Then we shall meet like brothers. It is my hope that you will accede to my request and thereby please the hearts of all of us. I am confident that you will not defy the Guru Panth and will abide by the tradition coming down through generations. Your sincere well wisher (s) Randhir Singh"⁹

Thus, no personal relationship would deflect Bhai Sahib from obeying in letter and spirit the edicts of the Guru Panth issued from Sri Akal Takht Sahib.

Conclusion

This very brief sketch of his life given above brings out clearly that he lived the life of the highest

concept of man evolved in about two and a half centuries by Sahib Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji in his ten manifestations. In spite of all these high spiritual achievements, he always remained humble and full of humility. He made stupendous sacrifices but never publicized them. He never felt hatred against even his adversaries who inflicted on him all types of tortures as he took all this as the Will of the Guru. He had a sizable group of associates attending and performing Kirtan at the Akhand Kirtan Samagams, but he did not organize them into a separate sect nor establish a separate Dera or Ashram as done by many other saints. He even refused to nominate anyone to head the Jatha as his successor and instructed that all the matters of importance and urgency be decided by the Panj Pyaras selected by the Sangat for that purpose.

He never even requested the Government of the Independent India to release his land, which had been confiscated by the British

Government at the time of his arrest, and held in possession by the Indian Government until 1950. No pension or benefit as a freedom fighter was given to him or his family. This was because he would not personally seek any favour from anyone, not even the Government of free India, as a reward for his sacrifices in the freedom struggle.

Right from 1900 A.D., Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh ji had been a very well-known personality among the luminaries of the Sikh Panth. During the days of Baba Kharak Singh's leadership, he was always at the center of all religious and political activities of the Sikhs. However, after 1947, Akali Dal leaders started sidetracking him as well as Baba Kharak Singh, treating both as unpersons. This was mainly because, in their company, the Akali and other leaders could not afford to fulfill their own selfish ends. Bhai Sahib, noting decadence in the Panthic leadership, had himself remarked a few years before his death: