

## **The Sikhs Deceived: The Betrayal of Sikhs by the Indian National Congress**

*The partition of Subcontinent embarked the new societal fabrication and division of United India transformed into Bharat and Pakistan. Pakistan had to face the issue of Bangali Nationalism and Pashtoon question but on the contrary, Bharat had to manage the Sikhs and the Indian authorities were successful to tackle the Sikhs through deceptive political steps. The Sikhs were lulled with fake promises and false words which were made with them during the partition drive. Soon after the establishment of Bharat, the Sikhs were denied to be recognized as the separate nation or separate religious ethnic group. They (Sikhs) were deceived by dominant Hindu element and the results were very fatal that Sikhs had to feel their apartheid conditions and yielded for more autonomy and later on for separate state where they could enjoy their liberties out of the influence of Hindutva. The Sikhs were considered as the sub section of the Hinduism and they were not recognized by the Indian constitution. This paper deals with the initial developments of Sikhs deception especially in the context of Indian Constitution.*

**Keywords:** Sikhs, Hindus, Congress, Betrayal, Punjab, Indian Constitution, Marriage Acts.

### **The Hindu leaders' assurances and the Sikhs**

The betrayal of Sikh people by the dominant Hindu community of India begins as early as year 1929.<sup>i</sup> In the winter of that year, 1929, at Lahore and All Indian National Congress party held its conference at which time the late Mr. Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and his father, Moti Lal Nehru, all went and waited on the Sikh leader, Baba Kharak Singh, at the latter's residence in Lahore.<sup>ii</sup> Baba Kharak Singh had the previous day headed a Sikh procession five hundred thousand that was described by the Times, of London, as:

*"A most impressive spectacle of human congregation that put the Congress show into shame and shade".<sup>iii</sup>*

These Hindu leaders then submitted a solemn assurance to the Sikh leader that after Indian achieved political freedom no constitution would be adopted by the majority Hindu community unless it was freely acceptable to Sikhs.<sup>iv</sup> This promise was thereupon incorporated into a formal policy resolution of the All India Congress Committee.

*"Our Sikh friends have no reason to fear that it (Congress) will betray them... Moreover the Sikhs are a brave people. They will know how to safeguard their rights by the exercise of arms if it should ever come to that .... Well, the Congress in its Lahore session passed a resolution that it would not endorse any settlement with regard to the minority question that failed to satisfy any of the minorities concerned. What further assurance can the Congress give you to set you at ease... IF THE CONGRESS SHOULD PLAY FALSE AFTERWARDS YOU CAN WELL SETTLE SCORES WITH IT, FOR YOU HOLD THE SWORD. I ask you to accept my word and the resolution of Congress that it will not betray a single individual much less a community..... No nation determined to immolate itself at the altar of freedom can be guilty of breach of faith. WHAT MORE CAN I SAY THAN THIS THAT LET GOD BE WITNESS OF THE BOND THAT BINDS ME AND THE CONGRESS WITH YOU?"<sup>v</sup>*

(These are the exact words of Mahatma Gandhi addressed to a large Sikh congregation assembled in the Sis-Ganj Gurdwara, in the Chandni Chowk, Delhi, on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 1931).<sup>vi</sup>

### **Indian National Congress and the Sikhs**

Thereafter, the 1929 Policy Resolution of Indian National Congress party was repeatedly reiterated, officially and semi-officially, up to August, 1947, When India was partitioned.<sup>vii</sup> The Congress Party's solemn pledges were not officially repudiated until the year 1950, when the present Constitution of India was legislated, without official Sikh participation in its enactment. This facile double-dealing and breach of trust on the part of the Hindu politicians, ruling India since 1947, resulted in the following events adversely affecting the Sikh position. The Indian National Congress leadership assured the Sikhs about their trust and support.<sup>viii</sup> Sikh religious instruction extols the keeping of faith as the highest of human virtues. Accordingly, in 1932, at the time of the Second Round Table Conference, the British Government in

London, through the Sikh representative, Sardar Bahadur Shiv Dev Singh, made an informal proposal to Sikhs that if they were to disassociate finally from the Indian Congress movement they would be given a decisive political status in the Punjab, such as would lead to their emerging as a third independent element in India, following upon the transfer of power by the British. But this British offer, in consequence of the assurances given by the Hindus, was promptly rejected by Master Tara Singh, the Sikh leader at that time.<sup>ix</sup>

In July, 1946, Jawahar Lal Nehru, the father of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, stated at Calcutta during a meeting of the All India Congress Working Committee:

*“The brave Sikhs of the Punjab are entitled to special consideration. I see nothing wrong in an area and a set-up in the north wherein the Sikhs can also experience the glow of freedom”.*<sup>x</sup>

Coming down to the British Cabinet Mission to Delhi, winter of 1946, under the same good faith syndrome created by the Hindu leaders of the Indian Congress Party (representing the majority, Hindu, community of India) the Sikh spokesman, late S. Baldev Singh, in consultation with the Congress Party leaders, summarily rejected a far reaching offer by which the British Parliament, in their solicitude for the Sikh people, was prepared to draft the Independence of India Act so that in respect to the Sikh Homeland, wherever these areas might eventually go in Pakistan or India, no constitution shall be framed such as did not have the concurrence of the Sikhs.<sup>xi</sup> Quaid I Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah tried to help them and accommodate them more than of their consideration.

In December, 1946, Nehru himself again stressed, in the constituent Assembly, safeguards for minorities, stating:

*“It was a declaration, a pledge and an undertaking before the world, a contract with millions of Indians, and therefore in the nature of an oath, which we must keep”.*<sup>xii</sup>

And yet it was the same Nehru, who, when reminded in 1954 by the Sikh leader, Master Tara Singh, of the solemn undertaking previously given, coolly replied:

*“The circumstances have now changed”.*<sup>xiii</sup>

Again, in May 1947, the Sikhs were politically tripped by the leaders of the majority community of India when the British Cabinet invited the Sikh spokesman, Sardar Baldev Singh, to stay behind in London for arrangements to be made:

*“So as to enable the Sikhs to have political feet of their own on which they may walk into the current of world history”.*<sup>xiv</sup>

Sardar Baldev Singh bravely declined the British invitation. The next day he made a press announcement to this effect in London. Accompanied by Nehru and other Hindu leaders he flew back to Delhi. He had scuttled once more any chances that the Sikhs had. All the Hindu Members of the old Punjab Legislative Assembly, while passing a resolution unanimously in July 1947 favoring the partition of the country<sup>xv</sup>, stated in that very resolution:

*“In the divided Indian Punjab, special Constitutional measures are imperative to meet just aspirations and rights of Sikhs”.*<sup>xvi</sup>

Where were those “special constitutional measures” in 1961? What is being done about “the just aspirations and rights of Sikhs?”<sup>xvii</sup>. And about the Punjab Hindu Legislators, who were the zealous makers of that 1947 unanimous resolution, aren't they the same Hindus now, who, since 1961, disclaim the Punjabi language itself as their native Sikhs and British Transfer of power to India. The Betrayal of Sikhs by the Indian National congress party, mother tongue? Aren't they the same Hindus who have made it possible for the government appointed Dar Commission<sup>xviii</sup> to take Punjabi speaking areas out of the original Punjab and turn those over to the artificial areas of Haryana and Himachal?

Finally, in 1950, when the Indian Constitution Act was legislated, the accredited Sikh legislators, representatives of the Sikh Akali-Dal, bitterly declared in the Constituent Assembly of India:

*“The Sikhs do not accept this constitution; the Sikhs reject this Constitution Act”.*<sup>xix</sup>

Those Sikh members of India’s Constituent Assembly then declined to put their signatures to India’s Constitution Act. This was a conclusive act of rejection by Sikhs of the new Constitution of India. The reason for this rejection was quite clear: The Hindu majority had broken their pledge and undertaking to provide suitably for an independent Sikh state in the Punjab area in northern India. The gravest peril that besets Sikhs today lies just a step farther. It is the peril posed by the policy of the majority Hindu government of Delhi today to tackle the Sikh question by strewing slow death in their path.<sup>xx</sup>

First, the balancing influence of Islam has been banished from the lives of Sikhs in the Punjab. The whole exposure now was to Hinduism, which was all around them. This was an unprecedented ecological change for Sikhism. Offers of Indian government positions, rewards, patronization, honors, and the Hinduization of Sikhs, socially and culturally, have been handy tools to win over a number of Sikhs whose tendentious service to the Hindu Raj now continually corrupts and confuses Sikhs and their politics.<sup>xxi</sup> At the same time the Hindu government had taken care that no Sikh is left in any important command position in the Indian Army, Navy or the Air Force.<sup>xxii</sup> Most of the old time, and some British trained, Sikh generals were forcefully made retired, some prematurely. And no new ones were in line to get important command positions in the Indian Armed forces. On the one hand it entices away Sikh leadership material. On the other, when these Sikhs were thus tempted away to greener political pastures and thus publicly forsake Sikh nation’s ideal and resolve for sovereignty, they shatter the credibility of Sikh leaders in the estimation of Sikh masses who thus begin to doubt and question leadership and beliefs. The process of demoralization of the Sikh under the Hindu Raj was thus complete.<sup>xxiii</sup>

This lethal process of desensitization of the Sikh political consciousness had to be resisted, and must stop. More than others, the press, the rich, the intellectuals, politicians, theologians, professionals, authors, Sikhs in positions of advantage - must resist and fight this noxious process of the majority community and government that will destroy Sikhs if not checked in time.

*“Hindus who form 80 percent of the population will in due course make Hinduism the state religion of India. The only chance of survival of the Sikhs as a separate community is to create a state in which they form a compact group”.*<sup>xxiv</sup>

Sikh Indian nationals were without proper protection of any state when they go abroad in the world. Indian embassies were no friends of Sikhs. They experienced every demoralizing treatment, in line with the home policy.

The “Hindu Marriage Act 1955” was India’s first special legislative bomb directed at the Sikh ethos and identity.<sup>xxv</sup> In time, it would secure the ‘civilized’ annihilation of Sikhs’ social organization. The enactment says that a Sikh, same as a Buddhist or a Jain, is a “Hindu” by definition for the purposes of the Act. Whereas in pro-independence era a Sikh was governed in his domestic matters by his own personal or customary law now he has, in result of the Indian legislation, lost that status.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The “Hindu Maintenance and Adoption Act, 1956” was the second legislative measure which aims to secure the social imprisonment of Sikhs within the Hindu fold.<sup>xxvii</sup> It enjoined that Sikhs must conform to the Hindu practice in domestic matters regulated by the Act. The legislation ensured the demise of the well-known Punjab Customary Law, originating in the Punjab Laws Act, 1872, which was especially enacted by the British for the protection of minorities of Northern India, especially in the Punjab, who were, way back, Asian immigrants settled<sup>xxviii</sup> in the Punjab and agriculturists by occupation.<sup>xxix</sup> Sikhs were the large majority falling in this category. Sikhs were thus now subjected to Hindu legislation against their will. Yet Indian Muslims were not covered by this legislation in which Sikhs were trapped. Clearly, it portended the death of Sikhs’ own social and customary institutions. What better non-violent death a people could be got to suffer? It was significant of the peril in which the Sikhs find themselves and it forebode the coming Sikh sovereign state, that the Sikh leadership in India has approached senior Sikh lawyers abroad to help draft and compile a Sikh Civil Code. A further peril to Sikh economy stems from India’s Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1973.<sup>xxx</sup> Every Sikh property holder who may have settled abroad, including Canada, is bombarded by India’s foreign embassies to enlist his assets left in India on pain of forfeiture and penalties.

This device penetrates the privacy of individual Sikhs settled abroad and ties them to the Indian Government.

## Conclusion

Both from legal and equitable points of view, from 1929 to till to date, the Hindu majority of India has been, is, and persists in continuing to remain the betrayer of the Sikhs. The Sikhs lulled with their false words and fake promises committed mistake to join hands with Indian National Congress but soon they had to realize that they have been betrayed and their deception is not by others but the Hindu leaders whom they trusted. As they were assured special consideration, they were not even recognized after the creation of Bharat. They were lulled before the division of subcontinent with the slogan that Sikhs are very powerful, brave and vibrant nation but the Indian Constitution declined to accept and acknowledge them as a separate nation. They were considered as the sub section of the Hindus. The Sikhs were not only targeted but also humiliated by the Indian Authorities and the ongoing developments proved it quit right that Hindus are the sole stake holders of Hindu Bharat and the secular Indian Constitution is nothing more than a document, portraying Indian Constitution as secular in the pages.

The secular India of Pandit Nehru severely damaged the societal fabric of India and the minorities had to suffer from the growing influence of Hindutva. The Sikhs suffered a lot as like Muslims are suffering Kashmir. The authorities termed them as sub sect of Hinduism and they rejected their notion as separate nation with rich past. The Hindu element in Punjab made them to feel that they are now oppressed and the Hindus are oppressors. The Sikh leaders in the Parliament refused to sign the draft of Indian Constitution but their voices were not given places and they were neither assured nor consulted. Later on, Indian Marriage Act 1955, Hindu Maintenance and Adoption Act, 1956 and Foreign exchange act were primarily to target the Sikhs. They were not recognized as separate from Hindus. They were not considered as the stakeholders of Punjab and the deceptive political tools led them to feel deceived and dejected. The Sikhs were even not spared in to their religious sanctuaries and they were considered as the unnecessary in the Indian federation. The tortured body of the Sikhs observed many marks of pain and blood and hundreds and thousands were abducted, kidnapped and extra-judicially were murdered. The Sikh Panth soon after the creation of Bharat and imposition of Indian Constitution and Nehruvian secularism found themselves in the hot waters and then the constitutional developments especially legal status of the Sikhs, their non-recognition as the separate nation and rejection of their separate identity further made the situation worse and the voices against the federation of Bharat as well as against the Hindutva aroused but the Hindu politician especially Congress maneuvered the situation and they played the tool of divide and rule and ultimately the early years of Bharat clearly depict the Hindu dominance and Sikh leadership failure.

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## References

\*Dr. Amir Ali, Assistant Professor, (Visiting), Department of History & Art, University of Education, Lahore.

\*\* Dr. Muhammad Hameed, Chairman, Department of Archeology, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

\*\*\* Dr. Muhammad Abrar Ahmad, Chairman, Department of History & Art, University of Education, Lahore.

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<sup>ii</sup> Sangat Singh, *The Sikhs in History*, (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2014), 182.

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.panthkhalsa.org/raj/raj\\_1947.php](https://www.panthkhalsa.org/raj/raj_1947.php)

<sup>iv</sup> Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 291.

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<sup>vi</sup> Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, 291.

<sup>vii</sup> Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. II, 277.

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- <sup>xvii</sup> Sikhs however are far better equipped to govern a sovereign state today than they might have been in 1947.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Khushwant Singh states that Sikhs showed remarkable unity in boycotting the Commission. In the general elections of 1962 Sikh-Akali Candidates swept the polls. According to the author of a History of Sikhs, Punjab's contribution in men and materials equaled that of the rest of the States of India put together in meeting the Chinese invasion.
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