

# DALIP SINGH ON MUSLIM-SIKH RELATIONS IN MOGUL INDIA: A PLURALIST APPRAISAL \*

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## ABSTRACT

*During the Mogul rule, ordinary Sikhs and Muslims as well as their leaders endeavored to maintain peaceful coexistence between these two communities of faith. However, it cannot be denied that there were conflicts that occurred between the Sikh Gurus and the Mogul rulers who were contemporaneous with the former. Dalip Singh reported in his books that these conflicts were not because of religious commitment of the Mogul bureaucracy to Islam but was primarily caused by political and pragmatic State concerns. This paper is an evaluation, rejoinder, and analysis of Dalip Singh's views regarding the tolerant nature of Sikh and Muslim relations in Mogul India by analyzing the conflicts that transpired during this particular timeframe and by determining whether the conflicts that occurred between the two communities were mainly due to religious reasons or rather to political, economic, and pragmatic exigencies and State considerations.*

## INTRODUCTION

**D**alip Singh, senior-researcher of Sikh Research and Education Center (SREC) based in Chesterfield, Missouri, USA, had written six voluminous books as well as numerous articles on the history, philosophy, and theology of Sikhism. His books are veritable sources of information on the history of Sikhism and the dynamics of the relationship between Sikh and Muslim citizens during the Mogul Empire's era of ascendancy in India. These books are very helpful resources in the presentation of the flow of events describing the relations between the ten Gurus of Sikhism and the Mogul emperors contemporaneous with these Gurus.

The rise of Mogul rule directly coincided with the flourishing of the spiritual ministry of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhi (Sikhism) and the subsequent ministries of the nine Sikh Gurus succeeding him. Utilizing Dalip Singh's books as bases of reference, I will evaluate and analyze his views regarding the dynamics of Sikh and Muslim relations in Mogul India by highlighting and

analyzing the conflicts that transpired during this particular timeframe and determine whether the conflicts that occurred between the two communities—namely Sikh and Muslims—were mainly due to religious reasons or rather to political, economic, and pragmatic exigencies of the time.

## The Historical Milieu of the Sikh Gurus' Relations with the Mogul Emperors

The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak (1469-1539 CE) had witnessed the defeat of the Turkic Lodhi rulers of Delhi and the rise of the Mogul regime under the leadership of the descendant of Timur, the victorious Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad Babar Padshah. The defeated Turkic Lodhi rulers and the Mogul victors were professing Sunni Muslims. Both camps were related by bloodline to the great Turko-Mongol clan of conquerors (the Al-Khanids and the Timurids) who ruled Middle East, Central Asia, and North India. The change of ruler-ship in the throne of Delhi—from the Lodhi dynasty to the new Timurid-Mogul conqueror, Babar—established more firmly the hegemonic hold of Sunni Islam in the Indian Subcontinent. The tenth

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**Editorial Note:** *The paper of Prof Espiritu is of its own kind in which the views of a Sikh writer have been analyzed by a Muslim writer. There is no doubt and history is a witness that Muslims were equally attractive to the egalitarian and monotheistic ideology of the Sikh Gurus and many of them have sacrificed their lives to save the Gurus' ideology. However, the tyranny of Mogul Empire on the Sikhs and the Sikh Gurus cannot be ignored. Prof Espiritu has done very good analysis of relations between the Muslims in general and Muslim rulers in particular, which is based on the information provided by Dalip Singh in his books. It cannot be denied that there are many flaws in representation of Sikh history and there is great need to set the Sikh history right. Hopefully this paper will be a starting point to work out the true nature of relations between the Muslims and the Sikhs and between the Hindus and the Sikhs.*

Devinder Singh Chahal

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and last Guru of the Sikhs, Gobind Singh (1675-1708 CE) struggled against the ultra-orthodox Mogul Emperor Aurangzeb. Guru Gobind Singh fought Aurangzeb on egalitarian principles, and not because of religious differences that occurred between them. This conflict was triggered by the emperor's apparent partiality and favoritism towards Muslims at the expense of his Hindu and Sikh subjects. While struggling against the oppressive and elitist policies of the Moguls, the Sikh Gurus also fought against the caste-ridden and discriminatory social practices of medieval Hinduism. This, in a gist, is the historical milieu and framework of the development of Sikhism as an egalitarian religio-philosophical faith.

### **Brahminic “Historical Myths” Purporting to Divide Sikhs and Muslims in Mogul India**

Reading Dalip Singh's books, I noticed the objectivity of his historical descriptions regarding the relations between the Sikh Gurus and the Mogul Muslim rulers. He identified what he calls “Brahminic historical concoctions” regarding many alleged events that transpired between the Sikh Gurus and the Mogul rulers [9, pp. 180-181]. Such historical myths purport to enlarge and blow out of proportion the Muslim-Sikh conflicts. According to him, Brahmin historians who were intensely opposed to the egalitarian and monotheistic message of Sikhism “concocted” these historical myths. Moreover, these Brahminic “historical concoctions” have adverse effects on the harmonious relations between Sikh and Muslim communities [9, pp. 182-197].

Dalip Singh's aim in re-evaluating Sikh history is to sort-out, reject, and dismiss “myths” that tend to destroy the cordial and concordant relations between Muslims and Sikhs in Mogul India. Take for example his strong denial of the popular story propagated by Brahmin historians (a story that is unfortunately believed by most Sikhs as factual history) that a Pathan mercenary under the order of Emperor Bahadur Shah martyred Guru Gobind Singh. Dalip Singh utilized more than one-sixth of the total pages of his book, *Life of Guru Gobind Singh* to prove that the story is a “Brahminic concoction” intended to sow discord among Muslims and Sikhs. He analyzed the factual events surrounding the last eighty days prior to the assault of Guru Gobind Singh's life to show that the story is a total fabrication. Likewise, he also narrated the harmonious, amicable, fraternal, and friendly relations that existed between the Mogul Emperor Bahadur Shah and Guru Gobind Singh [10, pp. 312-336]. He showed that Guru Gobind Singh and Emperor Bahadur Shah (Prince Shah Alam before his coronation) developed close friendship right at the start of the latter's enthronement to the Mogul throne. The emperor was a well-wisher of the Guru who offered the Guru a Mogul robe of honor symbolizing imperial camaraderie and favor. Bahadur Shah even assured the free movement of the Guru in the whole

breadth of Mogul territories. Furthermore, the emperor issued a *firman* (edict) guaranteeing the safety of the Guru and his disciples during the whole duration of his reign [10, pp. 289-291, 302-304].

It appears that Wazir Khan of Sirhind was the mastermind of the Guru's murder. Wazir Khan sensing the Guru's closeness with the emperor had been sending hit men and spies to find opportunity to murder the Guru. Wazir Khan was afraid that the Guru—who was now a very close friend of Emperor Bahadur Shah—would settle scores with him as retaliation for the former's murder of the Guru's sons [10, pp. 328-331]. According to Dalip Singh, the Pathan and his assistant before they were killed in an encounter with the Sikhs directly confessed that it was Wazir Khan who deputed them to murder Guru Gobind Singh. Emperor Bahadur Shah, who was at that time in Maharashtra—hearing of the murderous assault on the Guru's life—right away dispatched his surgeon (an Englishman named Mr. Cole) to treat the Guru's wounds. Furthermore, the emperor issued immediately a strong directive to round-up the 700 Pathans in the immediate vicinity where the crime was committed; as they may have harbored the Pathan assassin and his assistant. Guru Gobind Singh asked the Emperor not to do so since that act would entail punishing the innocents who may not be directly or indirectly involved in the reprehensible deed [10, pp. 329-330].

It is not my aim to prove whether Dalip Singh's above mentioned assessment regarding the historical circumstances surrounding the death of Guru Gobind Singh is correct or not. My purpose in narrating the above historical analysis is to show the commendable efforts of Dalip Singh in removing and weeding-out historical concoctions that may unduly affect an objective and just appraisal of Muslim-Sikh history during the Mogul era. Such gestures of fairness coming from a Sikh historian are indeed praiseworthy since there is no dearth of Sikh history books that exaggerate unhistorical polemics against the Mogul rulers. As I see it, Dalip Singh set the tone of historical factualness and unbiased objective research by removing many unfounded and propagandistic misinformation regarding the Sikh Gurus' relationship with the Mogul emperors.

### **Cordial and Harmonious Relations between Sikhism and Islam during the Mogul Era**

Dalip Singh noted various conflicts between Muslims and Sikhs and between the Gurus and the Mogul royalty. Nevertheless, he also emphasized that Muslims, particularly the Sufis, and their disciples (i.e., the ordinary Muslim masses), reached out and helped the Gurus in performing pious activities, in proclaiming the doctrine of monotheism, and in declaring the egalitarian

message of liberation from caste inequities. For instance, Bhai Mardana, a Muslim musician, assisted and served Guru Nanak from the start of his ministry until the Guru's demise [11, pp. 33-36]. The Sunni-Sufi saint, Hazrat Mian Mir maintained fraternal friendship with Guru Arjan and remained constantly by the latter's side all throughout the period of the Guru's imprisonment and eventual martyrdom. Hazrat Mian Mir successfully achieved rapprochement between the Emperor Jahangir and Guru Hargobind [9, pp. 178-179, 213]. It is also interesting to mention that it was Hazrat Mian Mir—who was a Muslim saint and not a Sikh for that matter, who laid the chief cornerstone of the holiest Sikh shrine, the *Darbar Sahib* in Amritsar, Punjab. Furthermore, the sacred scripture of Sikhism, *Aad Guru Granth Sahib* (AGGS), contains numerous hymns and spiritual poetry composed by Muslim saints, poets, and bards [9, pp. 179-180]. The above facts show not only the tolerant and all-inclusive nature of Sikhism but likewise, these facts provided historical instantiations of the deep friendship and goodwill that existed between the religious leaders of both communities.

Likewise, in the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh, many Muslim *awliya* (Sufi saints) enlisted themselves as the Guru's well-wishers, as example take the case of Sayyed Bhikha Shah who consecrated the Guru during the latter's infancy and foretold of the Guru's future spiritual greatness [10, pp. 30-31]. Pious Muslims like Pir Budhu Shah and his followers wholeheartedly helped the Guru to the extent that Pir Budhu Shah sacrificed his sons to defend Guru Gobind Singh from the armed attacks of the Hindu *pahari-raj* (hill-chieftains) of Himachal [10, pp. 190-192]. The Muslim soldiers, Nabi Khan and Ghani Khan as well as the Sunni saint, Sayyid Muhammad Nurpuri, helped Guru Gobind Singh escape the mercenaries of Wazir Khan, the governor of Sirhind [10, pp. 227-230].

These historical facts, and many more, were narrated to emphasize that a broad section of Muslims from the saintly class (Sufi sheikhs), the Mogul soldiers, mystical poets, as well as ordinary Muslims, enthusiastically aided the Sikh Gurus in their noble cause for a tolerant, caste-free, and egalitarian India. Furthermore, these narrations show that there were numerous instances of amity, concord, and friendship between the Sikh Gurus and their followers, and the Muslim Sufi saints and their disciples (i.e. the ordinary Muslim masses).

### **Not Islam Per'se but Mogul Discriminatory Policies that Caused Sikh-Mogul Conflicts**

Dalip Singh brings home two very important points in his analysis of Sikh-Muslim relations during the Mogul ascendancy in India. Firstly, the conflicts between the Sikh

Gurus and the Mogul emperors were brought about by the Mogul's elitist and discriminatory policies towards non-Muslims. Secondly, the caste-oriented Brahmins who detested Sikhism's egalitarian ideology, and who were firmly opposed to Sikhism's cutting criticisms of Hindu idolatry, ritualism, and casteism, oftentimes fan the Mogul emperor's conflict with the Sikh Gurus [9, pp. 16-24]. Dalip Singh also brings into the fore the part played by obscurantist Brahmins in fomenting conflicts between Sikhs and Muslims. He identified the role of Brahminic machinations in creating divisions between these two egalitarian religions. Unfortunately, most of the Sikh history fails to show the Brahminic instigations in the Sikh-Muslim conflicts. Dalip Singh stands out in contrast with other historians in his emphasis that most of the troubles that were experienced by the Gurus were not only due to the oppressions of the Mogul *Padshahs* (Emperors) but also due to the plots of upper caste Hindus who were fearful of the teachings of the Gurus against casteism. These Brahmins slandered the Gurus before the Mogul authorities [9, pp. 209-ff].

Dalip Singh enumerated many examples of Brahmin machinations against the Gurus. The immediate successor of Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, suffered from the disruptive plots of Brahmins who wanted him removed from the "guru-ship" for his spirited campaign against the caste system [9, p.13, 17]. According to him, there were Brahmins who aggressively supported the Udasi sect of Guru Nanak's ascetic son, Baba Sri Chand in order to create division among the Sikhs at the crucial time when the infant Sikh community suffered bereavement during the demise of Guru Nanak [9, pp. 13-19]. Similarly, a yogi-ascetic by the name of Shiv Nath Tapa—in collusion with local Brahmins—jealous of the rising popularity of Guru Angad among the masses; and envious of the general acceptance among the ordinary people of the Guru's institution of casteless dining (*Guru ka langar*), vehemently endeavored to remove the Guru from preaching his doctrine of pristine monotheism and egalitarianism in the town of Khadur and other outskirt areas [9, pp. 22-24]. Likewise, Chandu, the person who is responsible for the martyrdom of the fifth Guru Arjan; Pandit Krishan Lal who vehemently opposed the preaching of the eighth Guru Harkrishan; the upper-class Brahmins and hill-chieftains (*pahari rajas*)—these are not Muslims, but Hindus. [9, pp. 13-24, 209, 177-178, 312-313]. See also [10, pp. 166-177].

### **Sikhism's Concept of Righteous Warfare Compared with Islam's View of a Just Struggle (Jihad)**

Dalip Singh explained at length the full significance and the metaphorical symbolism of the sword that Guru



Gobind Singh required for devout Sikhs to perpetually carry in their person. The sword signifies the righteous authority of the One God [12, pp. 45-52, 97-98]. It further signifies the ideal way of life for Sikhs, viz, that true Sikhs should be submissive to the divine authority of God in the service of truth, integrity, human dignity, and justice even to the point of martyrdom (*shahidiyyat*) [12, pp. 53-64]. The Sikh sword is not meant to aspire for brute power and wealth—it is to be utilized for *seva* (service): service and submission to God’s authority, service to the *Khalsa* or Sikh community, and service to the whole of humanity. This is the full religious significance of the sword in Sikhism. All the Sikh Gurus strongly detest and explicitly forbid aggressive warfare, i.e. warfare for the sake of power grabbing and warfare that involves massacre of innocent non-combatants [12, p. 54]. Therefore, those wars entered-to by Sikhs that contravene the regulative principles laid down by the Gurus were devoid of religious legitimacy because such wars run counter to the Sikh tenets concerning righteous warfare (*dharam yuddh*). Thus, Sikhism should not be blamed for wars waged by Sikhs that go against the regulative directives set forth by the Sikh Gurus [12, pp.55-56].

As of this juncture, let me say that the Sikh teaching on defensive warfare is in perfect consonance with what Islam taught regarding *jihad*. When Prophet Muhammad sanctioned the use of the sword in a righteous struggle, he solemnly warned the Muslims that the sword is to be used only as the last resort and in self-defense for the sake of truth, justice, and humanity so that there will be no oppression and persecution that will overwhelm the Islamic community [1, *Al-Qur-an* 22:39; 2:190,193; 8:61] (Note #1). Warfare in the perspective of Islam and Sikhism is only utilized as the last resort for the defensive protection of the oppressed from the arrogant oppressors. Both religions believe that the sword is never intended for offensive or aggressive warfare. Defense for the rights and dignity of the human person is the only reason for drawing the sword—and only as the last recourse. Islam and Sikhism do not condone force and compulsion—both faiths stand for peace, tolerance, and amity [2, 405-443]. Islam, however, provides for the just defense of ones’ faith, life, and property. In the same vein, the sixth Guru, Hargobind and tenth Guru, Gobind Singh (as the last preceptor of Sikh lineage of spiritual masters) provided for defensive struggle against oppression (but not aggressive war) in their act of arming the Sikhs with sword.

I strongly believe that the parallel and analogous teaching of both Sikhism and Islam regarding just, defensive, and righteous warfare can be positively harnessed and be efficiently utilized as collaborative venues for interfaith dialogue between these two

religions. Furthermore, interfaith dialogue on the nature of what constitutes just warfare in Sikhism and in Islam can be effective settings for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation of historical animosities between Sikhs and Muslims since both communities will be able to reflect and analyze for themselves that the numerous wars that they waged against each other in the past did not have any religious warrants or justifications—and therefore the *raison d’etre* in many of these past wars were only for greed and thirst for power, and thus devoid of spiritual significance.

### **Not the Islamic Shariah Per’se but the Political Pragmatism and the Discriminative Policies of Mogul Bureaucracy that Persecuted and Oppressed the Sikhs**

Dalip Singh did not hesitate to narrate the grave injustices perpetrated by the Mogul *Padshahs* to the Sikhs and to their Gurus; but I truly marvel at the proper balance and intellectual prudence shown in his nuanced analysis of the actuations of the Mogul Sultans vis-à-vis Sikhs. Let us take the example of Emperor Aurangzeb. His decisions were always affected by pragmatic considerations of appeasing bigoted Muslims and Hindus who constantly flattered him in his royal *darbar* (court). Dalip Singh argued that Aurangzeb’s decisions were not specifically dictated by his commitment to Islamic Sunni orthodoxy; rather they were largely dictated by political pragmatism. He pointed out that during the ministry of Guru Harkrishan, the Sikh *masands* (feudal overlords) and the rival claimant to guru-ship, Ram Raie should be equally pointed out as among those who greatly persecuted the Guru and caused him much distress. They were the ones who presented their case to Aurangzeb and instigated the emperor to persecute Guru Harkrishan. The Sikh *masands* further appealed to the emperor to make Ram Raie the Guru instead of Harkrishan. In short, Emperor Aurangzeb’s commitment to orthodox Sunni Islam did not have much to do with his decision to imprison by house arrest Guru Harkrishan; rather it was Aurangzeb’s political and pragmatic move to please and to win-over to his side the rebellious Sikh *masands* and the rival claimant to the guru-ship, Ram Raie [9, pp. 307-320].

Dalip Singh deeply disagreed with most Sikh historians in their allegation that Guru Arjan was martyred because he committed treason against the reign of Emperor Jahangir by supporting the rebellion of Prince Khusro (the ill-fated son of Jahangir). He reasoned that Guru Arjan was a peacemaker as shown in all his religious writings. In these writings, he exhorted the Sikhs to live in amity with everyone and to abide by the laws of the land. The Guru was a staunch advocate of inter-religious harmony as shown in the material as well as spiritual help that he accorded with impartiality to the needy Hindu, Muslim,

and Sikh masses [9, pp. 169-203]. Given these facts, it is unthinkable that Guru Arjan supported the rebellion of Khusro.

Dalip Singh also opposed the allegation that Guru Arjan was penalized for rebellion, which in the Mogul times was public execution, according to the *Shariah* law [9, pp. 184-185]. He argues—and I believe, rightly so—that in the Mogul era, penal provisions in the *Shariah* law was not applied to persons who are not Muslims. Legally speaking, *Shariah* is defined as "the entire law and regulations taken or inferred from Divine Revelation (*Qur-an*) and Prophetic Traditions (*Sunnah*) governing Muslims in their individual and collective lives as Muslims from the cradle to the grave (*sic*)" [8, pp. 50-53. *Italics* for emphasis are mine. See also 6, pp. 57-69]. The Mogul rulers enforced the *Shariah* Law solely on the Muslim subjects and not to the *kufurat* (unbelievers), a technical term for non-Muslims [14, pp. 34-47]. It is, therefore, erroneous to claim that Guru Arjan, a non-Muslim, was punished according to the mandates of the *Shariah*. The Mogul officers in Lahore murdered the Guru, under the instigation of Chandu, a Hindu who was jealous of the Guru's fame. The Guru's martyrdom was also due to the slanders and intrigues of fundamentalist bigots (both Muslims and Hindus) in the court of Emperor Jahangir who for pragmatic reasons to remain in power, approved of the Guru's execution; and never because of the Islamic Law (*Shariah*), which solely governed the life of Muslims.

To properly understand Emperor Jahangir's verdict of putting to death Guru Arjan and whether such an order was based on *Shariah* considerations, it is relevant to provide direct quote from the *Tuzukh-e-Jahangiri*. The *Tuzukh* states:

*In Goindwal, which is on the bank of Beas River, there was a Hindu named Arjan. Masquerading in the mantle of sanctity and piety, to the extent that he had lured many from the simpletons among the Hindus, and even from the unwary and dumb adherents of Islam, by his conduct and pretensions; and they had trumpeted far and wide his supposed holiness. They called him Master, and from every corner, ignorant hoi polloi crowded to venerate and place their trust in him. For approximately three or four generations, their business is becoming popular to the dimwitted masses. I therefore intend to put a stop to this vain affair and bring him to Islam, the right path* [16, p.144].

The above mentioned quote is the only text in the *Tuzukh* that directly mentioned Guru Arjan and his religious activities. In the above text, Jahangir definitely identified the Guru by his name, Arjan. This text did not say anything to conclusively prove that Emperor

Jahangir commanded the execution of Guru Arjan using the *Shariah* Law as the legal basis. I must stress that this particular quote from the Mogul royal chronicle, *Tuzukh-e-Jahangiri* did not support the allegation that the execution meted to Guru Arjan was punishment for propagating a different religion in contradistinction to Islam. The above text only shows Jahangir's animosity towards Guru Arjan. The text however showed that Jahangir, in order to put an "Islamic sense or flavor" to his animosities against Guru Arjan, expressedly stated that he wanted to "bring him [i.e. the Guru] to Islam"—i.e. the Emperor intends to convert the Guru to the Islamic faith [16, p. 144].

Even if one argues that Emperor Jahangir invoked the penal code of the *Shariah* as the legal basis in putting Guru Arjan to death (a point that the *Tuzukh* did not assert); one must not forget the fact that the clear provision stipulated by preeminent *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) scholars like Hazrat Imam Abu Hanifa concerning the jurisdiction of the *Shariah* still clearly stands out—that non-Muslims (*kafir*) cannot be punished on account of Muslim Law since the *Shariah*, as explained by the four Imams of Sunni *fiqh* governs only the Islamic *Ummah* (community of believers) [6, 8, 14]. Punishing a non-Muslim by appealing to the *Shariah* is at best misguided and erroneous if one adheres faithfully to the clear pronouncement of Hazrat Imam Abu Hanifa as to the non-inclusion of *kafirs* from the domains of *Shariah* jurisdiction [6, p. 59] [8, pp. 53].

It should be borne in mind that the Islam which spread in Mogul Northern India, and adhered to by the *ulama* (religious functionaries) in Mogul court is the Sunni Hanafi School of *fiqh*. If these *ulama* prescribed *Shar'i* penalty to execute both Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur, these *ulama* were declaring something contrary to Islamic Law—their ruling (*fatwa*) can be considered null and void from the very beginning. Thus, it appears to me that the Mogul emperors Jahangir and Aurangzeb outwardly feigned allegiance to Islam by executing the Gurus Arjan and Tegh Bahadur, and allowed their respective chroniclers to write that the Gurus were executed for propagating a different religion. All the above measures were done by the Mogul emperor for propagandistic agenda; to placate and appease the rising ultra-orthodox Naqshbandi *ulama* whose influence were steadily growing in the Mogul *darbar* as shown in the meteoric rise of Hazrat Imam Rabbani Ahmad Sirhindi whose spiritual mastership (*Pir-Mureedi*) was acknowledged and sought-after by many *ashraf* (Central Asian Turks) nobles in the courts of both Jahangir and Aurangzeb [9, pp. 184-190].

If the Islamic *Shariah* was not supposed to be the legal corpus used in giving capital punishment to non-Muslims (*kufurat*) since technically the *Shariah* was to be

exclusively and solely applied to Muslims, then what punitive law did the Mogul Emperors use in penalizing non-Muslims, in particular the martyred Gurus Arjan and Tegh Bahadur? This question will be tackled in the next subsection.

### **The Mogul Rule was not an Islamic State in terms of Shariah Specifications but an Empire Governed by Turko-Mongol Traditions and Conventions**

To properly understand the Mogul policies in its dealings with Sikhism, it should be stressed that the Mogul Empire in India was never an Islamic State, nor was it intended to be a theocratic empire. Of course, I admit that within the Mogul administration, there were Sunni mullahs and Sufi mystics of varied persuasions and doctrines; in the same manner that there were also Hindu nobilities (i.e. the Rajputs) and Brahmin councilors. There were also agnostic philosophers in the officialdom of the Mogul emperors. Religious pluralism and multiculturalism existed in the Mogul court even during the reign of the ultra-orthodox Sunni Muslim Aurangzeb [7, pp. 145-147]. Objectively speaking, the Mogul Empire and its distant “cousin”, the Ottoman Sultanate in Turkey were pluralistic regimes. Yet there were times that orthodox Muslim nobles wanted to assert and were at times successful to some degree, in forcing the emperors to buy their own brand of Islamic fundamentalism [7, pp. 147-149] (Note #2). Nevertheless, in the general span of its existence, the Mogul Rule (likewise, the *Osmanli/Ottoman Rule* in Turkey) was essentially pluralist, tolerant, cosmopolitan, and openly secular.

According to Dr Alp Aqaoğlu [3], a scholar of medieval Mongol-Turkic governance, the criminal and penal laws implemented in Mogul India were not based on the *Qur-an* and *Shariah*. The penalties inflicted by Moguls and Turks were not based on the *Qur-an* but on the customary “*yasa-yarligh Chagtai Changiz Khani*” (i.e. traditional penal laws as practiced by Chughtai Turkic-Mongols and as inaugurated by Genghis Khan and his immediate successors) [3, pp. 21-59]. Therefore, the relatively brutal punitive laws of Mogul India were rooted in the customary criminal laws of the Mongols (*yarligh* or *yasa*), and were never based on Islamic *Shariah*. Halil Inalçik [5], professor of ancient and medieval Turkish administrative systems, likewise added that the Ottoman Sultans of Turkey and the Mogul *Padshahs* (Emperors) of India never intended to establish an “Islamic rule”—in the strictest signification of the term—during their periods of ascendancy. Both regimes established the *millat* or *mazhab* system of governance in their respective domains. This system entailed that all *millat* (cultural groups) or *mazhabs* (Urdu and Turkic term for religious communities) within the Ottoman (and Mogul) realm were autonomous and therefore, free to establish their own

religious and communal laws in their respective territorial domains; provided that these *millat* give their allegiance to the *Padshah*, pay the tributary taxes as token acknowledgment of the *Padshah’s* sovereignty, and provided further that the customary laws of the respective *millats* did not challenge the authority of the *Padshah* or the religious sensibilities of the Muslim majority [5, pp. 65-75, 89-118].

The preservation and expansion of their power in India were the overriding goals of the Mogul emperors. Their professed allegiance to Islam was likewise based on selfish pragmatism, i.e. whether their allegiance to Islamic orthodoxy will conduce or add to their security of power and territorial expansion [13, pp. 8-31]. The Mogul Rule was never an Islamic rule in the strict *Shariah* meaning of the term; instead, the Moguls only pragmatically utilized Islam for their own political convenience. Even an eminent orthodox Sufi Muslim saint like Hazrat Imam Rabbani Ahmad Sirhindi was likewise imprisoned by Emperor Jahangir when the former became critical of the policies of the latter; thus proving the contention that the Mogul *Padshahs* were moved not by bonafide Islamic zeal but by court intrigues and by pragmatic acts to ensure the maintenance of their power [15, pp. 39-40]. These facts further confirm and establish the contention that Guru Arjan never rebelled against the *Shariah* Law nor was he punished on account of the Islamic Law. His death was due to the intrigues sown by intolerant and bigoted religionists, both Muslims and Hindus (specifically Chandu); and not because of the *Shariah* penal code *per’se*.

### **Sikhism as an Independent, Monotheistic, and Egalitarian Religion and the Ever-present Danger of Hindu Assimilation**

Dalip Singh showed in his writings the arduous and painstaking revolutionary efforts made by all Sikh Gurus starting from Guru Nanak down to Guru Gobind Singh to distinguish the Sikh *Khalsa* from Hinduism. The Gurus imbue the Sikhs with egalitarian ideals to contrast starkly the societal inequalities of caste-conscious Hinduism. Beginning with Guru Nanak’s denunciations of the evils of casteism and idolatry, continuing with Guru Angad’s institution of communal kitchen and congregational dining (*Guru ka langar*) to break down caste barriers, and culminating in Guru Gobind Singh’s formation of the democratic and casteless *Khalsa* (Sikh community)—all these instill in the Sikhs the ideals of fraternity, justice, and equality. In their foresight, the Gurus insisted that the Sikhs are a distinct community. This insistence was made so that Sikhs will not be assimilated by the caste-ridden and idolatrous Hindu way of life, which were clearly against the Gurus’ egalitarian and monotheistic ideals. The Gurus knew the



strength of the Brahministic sway in Indian culture and mentality. They knew that if Sikhs will not be vigilant, there is a grave danger that the prevalent ethos of Hinduism will water down the Sikh ideals of egalitarianism and staunch monotheism—thus making it another sect of Hinduism like what happened to other egalitarian and anti-caste religious movements of India in the past. It was the spiritual genius and progressive forethought of the Gurus that made possible the survival of Sikhism as an independent world religion. In his writings, Dalip Singh alerted the Sikhs regarding the grave threat and the consequent danger of falling to the trap of Hindu assimilation and Brahminic syncretism [9, pp. 137-139].

### CONCLUSION

Dalip Singh amply recorded that there were many Muslims who, while remaining committed Muslims, were themselves true *Sikhs* (disciples) of the Gurus. These *Sikhi-Muslims*, if I may coin such a term, even laid their precious lives, the lives of their loved-ones, and their properties for the egalitarian cause of the Gurus. It is sad to see that many books on Sikh history only showed the sufferings of the Gurus in the hands of Mogul rulers, but failed to highlight the sinister treatments meted to the Gurus by the elitist and caste-conscious Brahmins. By recovering the specific contexts or historical framework of the Muslim-Sikh conflicts in Mogul India and by highlighting the various historical instances of Muslim-Sikh rapprochement that existed in Mogul India, historians will be able to promote a culture of dialogue and mutual respect between these two faith-traditions based on past-shared history of amity and concord.

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### NOTES:

1. Maulana Muhammad Ali Lahori, a scholar in Quranic exegesis, in commenting and in summarizing the pertinent passages in the *Al Qur-an* related to *jihād* (e.g., *Al-Qur-an* 22:39; 2:190,193; 8:61) says unequivocally that these passages explicitly proscribed and condemned in clear and certain terms aggressive warfare in the name of religion. Even defensive warfare has *Shar'i* (Qur-anic) regulative principles characterized by fairness and humane-ness to the enemy combatants. In no way are non-combatant civilians be included in a defensive warfare. He exhorted Muslims to pay special care and attention to the *Shar'i* conditions laid down by the Qur-an and *Sunnah* (practice of the Prophet) concerning legitimate and defensive warfare [1].
2. As this was in the case of Aurangzeb's reign (and to some extent during Jahangir's rule) when the conservatist Naqshbandi order of Sufis headed by Hazrat Imam Rabbani Ahmad Sirhindi became influential in the Mughal court. In his spiritual letters, collectively known as, *Maktubat*, Hazrat Ahmad Sirhindi repeatedly complained that the Mughal bureaucracy was very lenient towards the practices of non-Muslims; by tolerating and even by encouraging them. He asked the Mughal nobles to exert their utmost efforts in compelling the Mughal *Padshah* to implement pro-Muslim political and economic policies. The *ashraf* nobles who aligned with Hazrat Ahmad Sirhindi were relatively successful in persuading Emperor Aurangzeb to establish semblance of orthodox Islamic rule during his reign. [7, pp. 147-149]. See also [15, pp. 225-226].