

3. AN AVOIDABLE CONTROVERSY

Editor

The Tribune, January 18, 2001

The following Editorial was added when the manuscript was already in press because it was timely and so well-written that it should be taken as an eye-opener by the SGPC, Akali Dal and other religious and political parties and all other the Sikh Sects that how important it is to disseminate Gurbani and Sikhism in their real perspective among the Sikhs and Non Sikhs to ovoid such confusion in the future about the originality, uniqueness and independency of Sikhism from other religions.

Editorial Note, DSC

A wholly avoidable controversy is being sought to be ended by the RSS accepting that the Sikhs are a separate religion with a distinct identity. So far so good. But more efforts are needed to defuse the situation and ensure that the communal harmony in Punjab is not disturbed. There has been a long period of peace and friendship between the two religious groups and it is absolutely necessary to maintain it and keep it above narrow political or partisan considerations. To that extent the admission of the RSS that though Sikhism is a *panth* of “**the large Hindu society**”, it is different and needs a differential treatment is hugely welcome. This was plain from the beginning and emotions were aroused because insensitive statements were made about this theme. It is well to remember that Hinduism is a conglomeration of *panths* as is natural in an ancient and vast country. In fact the first “communal clash” occurred not along religious lines but across *panth* lines as between the Shivaites and the Vaishnavite followers of the newly started Ramanujacharya school and centuries ago. In this respect *panth* is not so much a strand of an established religion as an offshoot of it. Looked at this way, Sikhism is a full-fledged religion as is any Semitic one. On the other hand, India’s assimilative tradition ordains that all offshoots of the religious beliefs of the time like Jainism and Buddhism be treated as an integral part of the mother religion. That is the greatest strength and distinguishing characteristic of the oldest religion in the world. A clear

understanding of this basic principle is necessary both to sustain the fundamental strand of Indian civilisation and to retain its assimilative virtues.

Welcome as the RSS climb down is, there are unanswered questions. Mr M.G.Vaidya, the chief spokesman of the organisation, has said that the Sikhs, as indeed the Muslims and Christians, belong to “the larger Hindu society”. Perhaps he means the larger Indian society. But the repeated declarations of the RSS and the quaint interpretation the organisation gives to the term Hindu will cause unease among the minorities who fear being absorbed by the majority community. As the late Prof Attar Singh said in the mid-eighties, Hinduism has an enormous appetite to include welcome features of other *panths* and incorporate them in its own belief and cultural structures. No other religion has this resilience. While this fact makes the threatened sects suspicious, it forces the practitioners of the majority religion to be more careful so that they never deviate from the path of total trust. The statement of RSS chief Sudarshan and some hotheads in Punjab violated this simple rule. Still nothing is lost. Top RSS and the state’s RSS (meaning Rashtriya Sikh Sangat) should walk an extra mile to reassure the Sikh brothers that they have no hidden agenda and their stated aim to restore and strengthen communal harmony so vital in the border state is very much in force.

*{Reproduced with permission from The Tribune, Chandigarh, Online,
January 18, 2001-- Hari Jaisingh.}*

AN APPEAL

To promote the message of this Journal, please make others aware of its existence and ask them to become a member by contacting the Editor by mail, or email written at the Inside Front Cover of this Research Journal.

The Editor.