

Population of the Sikhs:

Sikh Tribes Ignored

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Part I

Most of the Sikhs will be surprised to know that they number above 12 Crores, as can be seen from the following table estimates:

No.	Group	Region	Numbers
1.	Local	Punjab, Kashmir, Haryana, Delhi & Adjoining areas	2 Crores
2.	Sikligar	Maharashtra, Andhra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Rajasthan, etc.	4 Crores
3.	Vanjaras	Maharashtra, M.Pradesh, Punjab, UP, etc.	5 Crores
4.	Satnamias	Chatisgarh, Jharkhand, Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, etc.	1 Crore
5.	Johari	Maharashtra	20,000
6.	Assami	20 villages of Assam	20,000
7.	Bihari	Kishanganj and Patna in Bihar	20,000
8.	Tharu	Bijnaour, UP	20,000
9.	Lamas	Karmapa and Naingmapa tribes of Tibet origin	1 Lac
10.	Sindhi	Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, etc.	2 Lacs
11.	Other Countries	Canada, England, America, Australia, Thailand, Malaysia and E. Africa	10 Lacs
12.	Other Sikhs *		10 Lacs
Total			12.24 Crores

* Other Sikhs include Namdhari, Radhaswami, Sehajdhari, Satkartari, Gangushahi, Suthreshahi, Nirmala, Ramdasia, Ramraia, Bandai, Niranjanis, Mahima Shahi, Singhji, Nanakshahi, Bihari Brandavani Hiradasi, Gulabdasi, Gahir Gambhiri Sikhs, etc.

Out of these four Crore are Sikligars, five Crore Vanjara Sikhs and one Crore Satnami Sikhs in India who are living below poverty line. These Sikhs are scattered in the states of Karnataka, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Tamilnadu, Maharashtra, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Chhatisgarh and Jharkhand.

Scholars from England and Scotland visited Punjab and Central India along with the representative of Sikh Institutions of Punjab. Following points have come before our attentions:-

1. In spite of being separated from the mainstream of Sikhism for long, Sikligars are in full Sikhism form whereas Vanjara and Satnami Sikhs have lagged somewhat in this regard.
2. The poor Sikligars and Satnamis are devoid of any Gurdwaras or Gurmat literature but they are very eager to partake of amrit.
3. Far from cities, their forest settlements do not have any medical facilities or any educational institutions. In many places these Sikhs lack even potable water.
4. The chief occupation of Sikligars is making iron implements, which is hereditary. Sikhs

living near cities are attracted towards other occupations. In far off settlements these poor Sikhs are prone to poverty and lack suitable shelter. Taking advantage of their poverty, other religions are active in converting them. The Indian government has been putting these Sikhs under the category of nomadic scheduled tribes. Some years ago Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Gopi Nath Munde even met the then Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, along with representative of Vanjara Kranti Dal for improvement in their lot.

There is no institutionalized propagation of Sikhism among Sikligar, Satnamis and Vanjara Sikhs of our religious bodies. Regrettably our Panthik leaders are either embroiled in local politics or are following the so called living gurus, leaving the *Shabad Guru*.

By looking at the figures in the table we can conclude that among the Sikh groups or tribes outside Punjab, the dominating number is of Vanjara, Satnami and Sikligar Sikhs who took on the rulers of the day following the message of equality and liberty of the Gurus, the cost of which they are paying even now. Suffering bad times and being shifted around here and there, these Sikhs have maintained the Sikh values and norms setting an example for other Sikhs. It won't be out of place to have a glimpse of their background.

The roots of Sikligars and Vanjaras go to Dhaj-Kodhaj-Karan-Kaishab. It is further divided into Chadha and Thida. Chadhas, include Nacchad(Nath), Jugad (Jogi) and Khimad(Sikligar) and Thidas, include Mota(Lubanas) and Maula(Vanjaras). All of these tribes associated themselves with Rathours, Parmas and Chauhans. The warriors of these tribes played an important role in Sikh struggle and paid with their lives.

Vanjaras:

Numerically the Vanjara tribe is the most important, spread all over central India. Vanjaras are among those Sikhs who irrigated, with their blood, the plant of Sikhism. They were so brave that men like Bachitar Singh turned away mad elephant by hitting his steel covered head with spear; so knowledgeable that after Bhai Gurdas, whatever interpretation of Gurubani has been done, it was by a Vanjara Sikh, Bhai Mani Singh, who was martyred for Sikhism. Vanjaras, like Makhan Shah sacrificed his wealth to search out the Guru, and Lakhi Shah burnt his own house to cremate the body of Ninth Guru, at Raisina.

Guru Nanak came in contact with numerous Vanjaras during the *udasis*. He composed rhymes addressing Vanjaras. Janamsakhis record Bhai Mansukh as the first Vanjara Sikh who got associated with the '*Gurughar*' and inspired Raja Shivnabh of Sri Lanka to embrace Sikhism. There was another Sikh of the Sixth Guru, Haridas Vanjara, the *daroga* of Gwalior fort. During Guru Hargobind's imprisonment Sikhs like Baba Buddha, Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Ballu, Bhai Parana and Bhai Kirtia would often come to him from Punjab. He would not only inform the Sixth Guru of all the news of the royal court but also provided all facilities. When Guruji was offered his release from Gwalior, he explained his important role as follows; "One day Haridas Daroga came to me and said, "When Emperor Jahangir sleeps in his palace he sees ghosts and hears shrieks resound in his mind asking him to release the '**Peer of Hind**' whom he has incarcerated in Gwalior fort". (*Guru Kian Sakhian*, P. 34) "Wazir Khan gave the Daroga his message to release the prisoners. After watching the message all those prisoners with longer sentences were left. I asked the Daroga, "What is written in the letter about remaining prisoners". He replied with folded hands: "Those who could not be released now can escape by holding the robes of the Guru". The Daroga was a Sikh of the Guru. I asked him to get a large sized robe stitched. By morning, all the rajas got freed holding onto Guru's robes. (*Guru Kian Sakhian*, P. 35-36)

Makhan Shah was associated with Sikhism since the sixth Guru. Bhatt Vahis testify to this: "The cavalcade of Bhai Makhan Shah who was the Sikh of Guru, was going to

Kashmir. The Satguru joined him there. After pilgrimage of Muttan Martand, along with Bhai Dasa and Bhai Aru Ram, he reached the place of Bhai Makhan Shah at Mota Tanda. Bhai Dasa, father of Bhai Makhan Shah breathed his last there.”

The Seventh Guru stayed with him in Kashmir. This is mentioned in ‘*Guru Kian Sakhian*’ and ‘*Bhatt Vahi*’ “Guru Har Rai, the seventh Guru, son of Baba Gurditta arrived in Srinagar, in the year Bikrami 1717, (Krishan pakh), panchami of Jeth month. Makhan Shah, son of Bhai Dasa, grandson of Binai, maternal grandson of Baheru, sub caste Vanjara came to him.” (*Guru Kian Sakhian*, P. 40) The Guru stayed at the ‘Tanda’ of Makhan Shah in Kashmir for four months. (*Bhatt Vahi Talaunda Pargana Jeend*).

The account of Makhan Shah Vanjara’s discovery of Guru Teg Bahadur is mentioned thus in Sakhis:

“On the festival of Diwali of 1721, people from far and wide came to seek blessings of the Guru. There was a big spectacle in the village of Bakala. Makhan Shah Banjara came with his people to seek blessings of the guru. His ship was stuck in cyclone near Tremu harbour. He pledged gold 100 coins and came to Bakala town. At first, he was led to the house of Dheer Mal by the attendants of this fake. Makhan Shah gifted five coins. Dheer Mal saw him off after bestowing *siropa* on him. Makhan Shah came to the court of Guru Teg Bahadur, thereafter, and gifted five coins. Guruji smiled and asked him what he had pledged. The Guru said, “Makhan Shah! Your wife has brought coins in a red bag with a green string. The bag is with your elder son who is standing behind you.” At this, he bowed his head and his son gifted the bag. Makhan Shah came out and shouted thrice, “O people! I have found the Guru.” (*Guru Kian Sakhian*, P. 61-62)

Makhan Shah Banjara remained Guru’s devoted Sikh and his son Kushal Singh attained martyrdom fighting along with the Guru’s forces in Lohgarh fort. More touching is the story of Lakhi Shah Banjara who brought in the body of Guru Teg Bahadur from Nakhas chowk stealthily and made his own home the cremation pyre. Nayak Bhagwant Singh did not care for his title of Panj Hazari given by Aurangzeb and made his house a safe haven for Sikhs.

The sacrifices made by this tribe to preserve Sikhism are unprecedented. Over 100 Vanjaras Sikhs have been listed here as an example, but they number much more. From the list we find three brothers, Bhai Dayala boiled alive in pot(tegh),

Bhai Mani Singh was cut limb by limb, Bhai Jagat Singh was skinned alive and Bhai Mani Singh’s son, Chitar Singh was tied with spokes. Their six other brothers also achieved martyrdom similarly while preserving Sikhism. Almost whole of the family of Bhai Mani Singh has entered the list of martyrs.

Besides these, martyrdom of 40 other Banjaras at Alawal, near Multan, on October 11, are recorded in *Akbarat-e-Darbar-e-Muala*, October 11, 1711, 10 Ramzan Hizri 1123, year Panoram Bahadurshahi: **“Sarbrah Khan Kotwal received orders that 40 Sikhs have been brought in the Kotwali from Multan. Ask them to accept Islam, otherwise kill them. The Emperor was told that they did not yield. An order was given that they be killed”**.

Some samples of their valour are given as follows:- “On the orders of Guru, Bhai Mani Singh son of Mai Dass, grandson of Ballu, Bachittar Singh, son of Mani Singh, Udai Singh, son of Mani Singh... in the year 1757, month of Assu, on the first Thursday, at fort Lohgarh the bank of Charanganga river fought an intense battle. Bachitar Singh forced the elephant to with draw and run away. Kesri Chand Jaswari was killed at the hands of Udai Singh. Mani Singh was grievously injured. Alam Singh, son of Daria and grandson of Moola, Sucha Singh son of Rai Singh, Kushal Singh, son of Makhan Shah were martyred. (*Bhatt Vahi Talaunda, Pargana Jeend Khatta Jallhanon Ka*)

***Baj Singh** – In the year 1765, 3rd of Kartik the Tenth Guru nominated Banda Singh as the Jathedar of Panth and sent to Madar Desh in the Tanda of Bangesari. Five selected Sikhs: Bhai Bhagwant Singh, Koir Singh, Baj Singh, Binod Singh and Kahan Singh were sent along with him (*Guru Kian Sakhian*, p. 187) Banda Singh deputed the Majha group under Binod Singh, Baj Singh, Kam Singh and Sham Singh.....*The rule of whole of Sarhind was given to Baj Singh* whose third brother, Sham Singh lived with him, while the fourth one, Koir Singh was in the deployment of Banda. In the tenure of Banda, Baj Singh earned a name unequalled. He was a distinguished warrior and acknowledge brave. His brothers were no less. That was why two of the posts were given to them and their writ ran among whole of the Dal. On reading whole account of Banda one can easily conclude that he did not commit any mistake by having faith on Baj Singh because till his last this brave man remained with him, and attained martyrdom along with Banda in Delhi (Karan Singh Historian, *Banda Singh*, P. 34-41). **Bhatt Wahis have this record “Bhagwant Singh, Koir Singh, Baj Singh, sons of Nathia and grandsons of Ballu Rai.... attained martyrdom, along with Banda, on the banks of Jamuna, near the tomb of Bakhtyar Kaki, in the year 1773, month of Ashad, at the dawn of the first day (Bhatt Vahi Bhadson, Pargana Thanesar).**

[To be continued]

