

## **A Faith Reborn**

**Annie Besant**

On the tenth guru govind we must pause for a while. A boy of nine, he shows rare courage after his father's murder, and, for some twenty years, he remains in contemplation and virtual retirement, thinking out his divinely inspired mission. Naturally, he broods over his father's martyrdom, naturally he is bitter against his father's enemies; the hatred of tyrannical Mughal regime seems to become almost a duty for the son, for the Guru, and therefore the Sikh. The old friendship has vanished; the blood of a father lies between the Guru and the fanatical if austere Emperor. For some twenty years, as I say, he remains in reflective retirement, thinking over the work that lies before him, thinking over his work as a religious teacher, but still more as a military organizer. And, at last, he comes out from his retirement ready to do a mighty work, prepared for his life's ordained mission. He is determined definitely to separate off the Sikhs from all possibility of confusion with men of any other faith.

Five devoted disciples he calls around him on Vaisakhi 1699, these five men and himself in the midst, he institutes the ceremony of Pahul, simple initiation, warrior-like. He takes water; his wife happens to be passing with five kinds of sweetmeats, and he takes of the five sweetmeats, a little of each, and throws them into water. He stirs the water with a two-edged knife; he sprinkles it on the five men around him, and gives to each of them to drink, and they in turn sprinkle him and given to drink, and he proclaims them as the Khalsa, the pure, and bids them add to their names the epithet of 'Singh', the lion.

These are the first initiated disciples, marked out from all others by special signs that every Sikh must carry on his person. The long hair, dividing him from the shaven Hindu; the comb, the two-edged dagger or knife; the steel bangle; the short breeches, coming to the knee. These are the five marks - the Five K's as they are called, because each begins with a K in the vernacular - whereby he separates every Sikh from all surrounding him, and which the true Sikhs bear to-day. That is the ceremony which he lays down as the ceremony of initiation, and wherever five Sikhs are gathered together, there, he said, would be his spirit, and there the power of initiation. He is to be last of the Gurus; after him no other teacher is to come; the power is to go into the hands of the Khalsa to be exercised by the council of its chiefs, the Guru Mata; the authority for the Sikhs lies in the sacred book which, later, Guru Govind completes and enthrones in 1708.

Now he is the warrior saint and the Sikhs flock around his standard. He fights, he struggles, he builds up a great army; his men are known by their marvellous courage, by the way they face great odds in battle; the same passion that we saw animating the early Islam after the great Prophet Mohammed, is seen also in the warrior Sikh, and they died as joyfully as other men lived. No wonder that at first they carried all before them; yet, after much struggling, being but a few, after all, amid myriads, we find them beaten back in the struggle that they undertook with such heroism against overwhelming numbers, for these few had set themselves against the mighty Mughal Empire across the North.

They are but a few against myriads, but they are never discouraged, never terrified, never disheartened; their Guru is with them wherever they go, and where he is they are confident - he is beaten back, until at last, by a splendid effort, he turns and drives off

the troops of the enemy; they pursue him no further, The city of salvation the place is called, where that saving battle was fought, Anandpur to complete the Mission.

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