

Ratan Singh Bhangu's "Prachin Panth Prakash"

Firstly, a Story of the first appearance of the Khalsa

[Guru's striving for the Panth]

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PART V

* **NOTE:** Since Sri Gur-Panth Prakash (by Bhangu) is in poetic form, the numbers at the end of sentences are couplet numbers and not reference numbers.

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Story of the birth of the respected Khalsa Order at Kesgarh

(Initiation ceremony) [Five Young persons come into existence].

Couplet: By this thought process, the True Guru discerned what should happen. He sat at the 'blessed fort of uncut hair' and made that effort.¹ He called the greatly learned astrologers and had the auspicious moment identified with much fanfare. He selected five young persons from five different castes. ²

Quatrain: He inspired five young men to rise. He fused the four *varnas* into one brotherhood. First amongst them was Daya Singh Sobti by caste. He was known to be living in Lahore.³ Second was Dharam Singh resident of Hastanapur, he was a Jat born of Shiva's matted hair. Third was Mohkam Singh born at Dwarka. He was the incarnation (caste) of Namdev (weaver).⁴ Fourth was the barber Sahib Singh. He lived at the place of Sain Bhagat. Fifth was Himmat Singh the water carrier. Five castes yielded five young people.⁵ *Pahul* of the double-edged sword was prepared. Sweets were added to water. In the middle of it was planted and maintained the sword. The True Guru kept the dagger on the sharp edge.⁶

Couplet: The respected True Guru, invoking the Primary Cause, uttered the True Name. Invoking the Deathless One sought His mercy.⁷

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Quatrain: The first quatrain of the Vaar of the sword, composed by the True Guru was first read. Citing remembrance of the earlier nine Kings, the Tenth invoked their help. After that he recited well the thirty-two *swayyas* from his sacred mouth. Into the *pahul* he read the fast moving, well sculpted verses.⁹

The Thrice-bent Composition:

The Destroyer of the cobwebs of Nescience,
Decimator of the hosts of Evil,
Hero of the Armageddon,
The Mighty one!
Of invincible might,
The Nova of blinding Light,
Invested with solar Effulgence,
The Refuge of the good and the godly,
The Dispeller of Misknowing,
Expiator of the Original Sin,
Of that pure steel Sword I seek protection.
Hail, hail to You, the ultimate Cause of Creation!
Hail, hail to You, the Sustainer and Protector
Of the Universe,

Hail to You, my helper and support.
Glory be to the Sword! Hallelujah to the sharp-edged Emblem of Justice, Authority and

Power.

[This very perceptive translation of the verse is by Sirdar Kapur Singh. See *Prasaraprasna*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1988, 112]

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Couplet: The respected True Guru filled the first palm-full and calling upon them aloud sprinkled it in their open eyes in front of him.¹⁰

Quatrain: He made them remember God by the 'Deathless' epithet and the Guru caused them to repeat the 'Victory to God' greeting. He then poured five hand-full each of it (*amrit*) on their heads and made them drink another five each.¹¹ In one vessel he made them one and obliterated all differences of all sorts. He made them discard the sacred threads and auspicious marks, (also the concepts of) four colours (*varnas*) and the 'four stages of life.'¹² The True Guru thereafter instructed them to have no social relations with (mean followers of Pirthi Chand) *minas* and *masands* (a priestly order) and their followers. 'Those who maintained social relations with killers of female children, hookah smokers and followers of Ramrai, will come to a sad end.'¹³ According to their capacity they were to contribute to the Guru's treasury (common fund) and were to treat the Khalsa to the butter-wheat flour-sugar pudding. They were to wear turbans on their heads and the short breeches. They were to heed to the word of *Guru Granth* only.¹⁴

Couplet: Saying this, the respected True Guru put swords around their necks. Miniature swords and the quoits (*chakra*) were placed on their heads. He made them to repeat the name of God in 'Deathless' attribute.¹⁵

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Quatrain: He further instructed: 'always read the Guru's (*bani*) compositions. Meditate and recite the Japuji both in the morning and in the evening. Anand Sahib and Rehras must be recited and the word regarding the sword must be recited in the standing posture.'¹⁶ Both in the morning and evening you must tie the turbans afresh. At all times be fully alert and keep the weapons handy. Take *amrit* and go hunting.¹⁷ Eat goat's meat, prepared by sudden killing do not even go near dead animal killed by *halal*. Maintain hair, and never cut them with razors.¹⁸ Abandon the religious practices of ancestors. Contemplate consistently on the Guru's feet. Impose *tankhah* (token fine) on those who revert to the base path.'¹⁹

Couplet: By the same method as the True Guru had administered it in the beginning, he himself received *pahul* from the five young men he had initiated.²⁰

Quatrain: The same procedure was followed by the young men; the Guru became known as both Guru and the disciple. This tradition had always been followed from the earliest times, just as Guru Nanak had accepted Guru Angad as Guru.²¹ On taking the *pahul* and by living according to the Guru's word, the Khalsa was liberated and attained to greatness and glory. The year was 52 more than 1700, it was Wednesday of the month of Baisakh when the *panth* was inaugurated.²²

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Story of the spread of the Khalsa panth

(this is how the Khalsa Panth was born –)

Couplet: From that very day the Khalsa started spreading. Everyday Singhs in fives, fifties and hundreds joined it.¹

Quatrain: The True Guru entrusted everything to the Khalsa. At all places the Khalsa was made responsible. To the East, West, North and South, he sent the Khalsa.²

Couplet: To Amritsar, Patna and wherever the Guru had establishments and institutions, young Khalsa was especially and carefully despatched with words of encouragement and cheer.³

Quatrain: Permission was given to every establishment of the Guru, to dispense *pahul* of the double-edged sword in accordance with the prescribed method. Wherever there were five young Khalsa, the place was deemed to be equal in status to the Guru's residence.⁴ Wherever five young Khalsa assembled they without doubt had the authority to prepare and administer *pahul*. Have the five young persons pray and obtain what ever is desired. ⁵ The Singhs alone used the offerings at *gurdwaras*. 'Only surpluses are to be sent to me.' Letters were sent to congregations. 'Come over and obtain the *pahul* of the double-edged sword.'⁶ Take the *pahul* of the double-edged sword and become the bearers of light. 'Now defeat the Turks.' *Pahul* of the double-edged sword is now the repository of power. The Turk will runaway yielding to the immortal *panth*.⁷

Couplet: Whatever the True Guru commanded, people of the midlands (Majha region) complied with. All others who accepted them, too attained blessedness.⁸

Quartet: This is how the Khalsa Panth was born. The True Guru was very happy on seeing it. The True Guru gave training in weapons and prescribed uniforms of various kinds.⁹

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The Guru would seat himself on a cot amidst them and all around him would stand armed Singhs. The True Guru would look elegant amongst them as Krishan would have looked amongst the milk-maids.¹⁰ He would ask the Singhs to execute parade and to run. Some would be asked to stand around for inspection. Some would be seated, made to get up. Some would be asked to stand and yet others would be made to run.¹¹ Some would be given heavy staffs and asked to exercise in pairs. True Guru would go and stand in a ploughed field. The Singhs would have mock fights using mud lumps.¹²

Couplet: The Singhs played *saunchi*, they would strike, resist and wrestle. True Guru watched them pleased and assigned countries as grants.¹³

Quatrain: True Guru said, 'ask for land assignments. You will get the lands and those very pastures. The places that catch your fancy those very places will be assigned to you.'¹⁴ On hearing these words they opted for nearby lands. They immediately wanted to occupy the Punjab. The True Guru said, 'ask for better areas in the south, the north, east or the west.'¹⁵ The Singhs said. 'why should we go far. We will rule in the Punjab only.' Repeatedly, many Singhs opted for the Punjab, preferring to be wasted in mutual quarrels.¹⁶ The True Guru said, 'ask for extensive lands. Take possession of as much as you desire.' The Singhs were obsessed with local relatives. 'We want to justly avenge ourselves.'¹⁷ They only desired to occupy territory near about their own homes. They were born of the deprived and would not venture far reaching claims.¹⁸

Couplet: Being engrossed in family feuds, they concentrated near about the Punjab. Guru encouraged them to think of far off lands but they had no desire for them.¹⁹

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Couplet: The respected True Guru told them 'because of mutual quarrels you have confined yourselves to Punjab. Those Singhs who come after you will occupy other foreign areas.'²⁰

Couplet: Much more is written in the *Gurbilas*. I have written a condensed summary. Whatever is briefed by Sukha Singh, I will elaborate it.²¹

Quatrain: Those who need to hear it all may look it up in the *Gurbilas*. As the mountain people battled, they earned the odium. He has said much in the *Gurbilas* about it. I will relate only what he has left out. This wonderful tale is profound and beyond my comprehension. How can I know it all? ²³ Listen to me my Guru-oriented brothers, I will try to elaborate the same story further as I comprehend it. Now the tale has come to the point of talking about the Singhs.²⁴

Couplet: Then, after instructing them carefully, the True Guru ordered the people of the middle country (the *majha* region, midlands), 'first increase the numbers of the Khalsa and thereafter let resistance flare up.'²⁵

Nihang Singhs

Quatrain: The initial initiated young men were sent towards the midlands. They were administered *pahul* and were settled in the Guru's town (Amritsar). Thus the *panth* of the Nihangs (alligator) and of 'cobras in striking posture' (*bhujangi*) increased much. They held staffs in their hands and had double-edged swords around their necks.²⁶

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Some became nomads, some settled down around the Gurdwaras and others built guest houses and living quarters. They invited the initiated young men and served them food and maintained no social relations with others.²⁷ If some initiated young men required some subsistence he could take it from the house of the Singhs as a matter of right. After he had had his fill, the visitor was allowed to carry whatever he could of butter oil, wheat flour and salt.²⁸ They uttered (announced themselves), 'Sikh lady! Nihangs have come. Open the gate without hesitation.' If it was a Sikh woman, she would present whatever they wanted.²⁹

Couplet: Like this the Sikhs went everyday after locating the houses of the Singhs. The Sikh house-wives enthusiastically provide whatever they asked for.³⁰

Quatrain: The *panth* then increased much and required much money (for subsistence). Those Singhs who were poor and had nothing at home would pick it up from the houses of others.³¹ They would keep aside silver and gold and take food and clothes. This led to quarrels at many places as people of the locality raised objections.³² Most of the people then were followers of Sakhi Sarvar, and maintained a hostile attitude towards the Singhs. Amongst them there were the few houses of the Singhs. They wanted to expel the Singhs.³³ 'Because of you the Singhs come to our houses and bother us much.' Enmity between the Singhs and followers of Sakhi Sarvar increased and many skirmishes took place between them.

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Couplet: Houses of the Singhs of the Guru were in want and followers of Sakhi Sarvar had a pile. They would not let the Khalsa enter. They entered at odd times.³⁵

Quatrain: A few Singhs were not allowed to enter. The Singhs would send (rations) to them outside. So the young people organised themselves into a big army, ten to twenty of them formed a camp (*dera*).³⁶ They went and camped near a village. If they were harassed much and were not given (supplies), they in turn bothered them much and vandalize wells and destroy crops.³⁷ The Khalsa adopted this strategy and whiled away some time in this manner. When the *panth* increased much, the Singhs then decided to levy taxes.³⁸ Every passing day the *panth* increased. Food and clothing became scarce. Then the *panth* resolved 'felicitation cess (tax) must be levied on the villages.'³⁹

Enmity between the Singhs and the Turks

Couplet: People would refuse to pay taxes and the Singhs would realize them by force. They went and appealed to the Mughal administration.⁴⁰

Quatrain: A contingent of the Mughal army came and apprehended many Singhs. They were arrested and sent to Lahore where the Mughal governor had them killed.⁴¹ When this happened to the Singhs they too rose in revolt. The Singhs also killed smaller forces. When outnumbered, they merge with bushes.⁴² Quarrel between the Singhs and Mughals increased; when had they ever been friendly? Dishonest Hindus joined them. The majority became enemies of the *panth*.⁴³

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Worshippers of Sakhi Sarvar were half Muslims but the lying useless ones called themselves Hindus. They had the Singhs arrested by giving information. The Singhs would locate and eliminate the informers in their homes.⁴⁴

Couplet: They killed the Singhs they could lay their hands on. This is how great hostility developed between the followers of Sarvar and the Singhs.⁴⁵

Quatrain: Smaller numbers of Jats could not contain the Singhs, so they would bring in many Mughals. The Singhs would go and merge in the bush land. They harassed and plundered the Mughals at other times.⁴⁶ When they were not able to prevail against the *panth*, they would locate and arrest the parents of the Singhs. They would also arrest and kill the householder and worker Singhs.⁴⁷ Those Singhs who lived in Gurdwaras, in rest houses and in private homes, would be arrested and handed over to the Mughals. They would be killed by being beheaded.⁴⁸ If the Sikhs were overpowered anywhere else, they too would be immediately killed. Even then they would not be tempted to convert; people of the middle-country were never afraid of dying.⁴⁹

Couplet: Their conduct was wonderful so also was their ideology and they would read the Guru's Word much. Seeing this, some would forsake the senseless followers of Sakhi Sarvar to come and join 'those treading the path laid by the True Guru' (*panth*).⁵⁰

Quatrain: The *panth* continued to increase by day and by night. Many brought food from their homes for the Singhs. Some one's son or grandson or some people themselves joined the Khalsa on seeing their moral grandeur.⁵¹ Some who were paupers without anything to eat or to wear, found solace in joining the Khalsa. He who was a land-tax defaulter or he who had gone bankrupt and owed money (also joined).⁵² Those who were oppressed, harassed and had no safe place to live anywhere, joined the Khalsa Panth where there was nothing to worry about.⁵³

Couplet: Like this the people were born to the Khalsa everyday swelling its numbers from birth to birth. Like an ocean the *panth* was eternal. Who could dry it up.⁵⁴

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Quatrain: The *panth* was small and had limited resources and had no capacity to establish control. Mughals were far more numerous, administered the whole country and had a especially large standing army.⁵⁵ They had big forts, a large artillery park and the Singhs had no such equipment. Followers of Sakhi Sarvar joined them thus increasing the harassment of the Singhs. The Singhs deserted their homes and merged with the bushes.⁵⁶

(End of Part V)
- To be continued

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