

The Tradition of Guruship in Sikh Religion

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The Sikh Religion is a very modern way of life. This universal religion originated with the advent of Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru. He was succeeded by nine other Guru Sahibans, with Guru Gobind Singh Ji as the 10th Sikh Guru. The line of succession was then passed on to the sacred scripture, the 'Guru Granth Sahib'. Today, the 'Guruship' of the Sikh religion rests in the "Guru Granth Sahib". As we prepare to celebrate the 3rd Centenary of the installation of the Guru Granth Sahib as the 'Eternal Guru' of the Sikhs, it would be interesting to know the history of the succession of the 'Guruship' in the Sikh Religion. Some of the more commonly known events are enumerated here.

Guru Nanak laid the foundation of the new religion. This new approach was meant to serve two important functions: (i) to unite man with God, and (ii) to set moral relations with one's fellow beings. These two aspects – 'spiritual' and 'temporal' – of human life in this world cannot be forsaken or ignored. For understanding these aspects, it becomes necessary to know about the history of succession of the 'Guruship' in this modern religion. The advent of Guru Nanak has been described in a large number of contemporary compositions. The fifth Nanak, Guru Arjan, describes the relationship between the spiritual and the temporal aspects in a composition recorded in the "Guru Granth Sahib" (Page 322 - "*Dharan Savini Khar Rattan Jardavi Har Prem purkh man voutha. Sabe kaaj suhaleedi theea Guru Nanak Sat Guru thutha*") which has been translated as follows:

Guru Nanak did not pass on the Guruship to either of his sons, but after careful evaluation of the devotion and understanding of the beliefs, anointed His disciple '*Bhai Lehna*' as his successor. The description of the succession from Guru Nanak to Guru Angad as described by '*Satta and Balwand*' and recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib (page 966 – "*Nau karta kadar kare que bol hovae jo khevda. De guna sat bhed bharav hai parangth daan parhdhevde...*") has been translated as follows: "*One who chants the Name of the Almighty Creator - how can his words be judged. His divine virtues are the true sisters and brothers; through them the gift of supreme status is obtained. Nanak established the kingdom; he built the true fortress on the strongest foundations. He installed the royal canopy over Lehna's head; chanting the Lord's praises. He drank in the Ambrosial Nectar. The Guru implanted the almighty sword of Teachings to illuminate his soul. The Guru bowed down to His disciple, while Nanak was still alive. The King, while still alive, applied the ceremonial mark to his forehead. Nanak proclaimed Lehna's succession – he earned it. They shared the One Light and the same way; The King first changed his body. The immaculate canopy waves over Him, and He sits on the throne in the Guru's shop. He does as the Guru commands; He tasted the tasteless stone of Yoga.*"

This was no ordinary succession. It is firmly believed that the same light or "*jyot*" passed on from Guru Nanak to Guru Angad. This was due to the Guru's '*Bani*' or the Guru's compositions or "*Shabad Guru*" as the path for understanding the new religion.

Bibi Amro, the daughter of Guru Angad, transformed Amar Das from a seeker of knowledge to a giver of knowledge. She used to recite Gurbani in a sweet and melodious voice everyday. Amar Das, the brother of her father-in-law, was wonder struck by the message of the Guru. Again it may be mentioned here that it was the

"*Guru's Bani*" which served as a beacon. This pious man, Amar Das, had been on pilgrimage several times in the true Vaishnav concept. He had been to the sacred Ganges at Hardwar and had met several saints. But he always felt a void or emptiness in his soul. He had not met a True Guru who could help him to realize his objective of attaining oneness with God. On being greatly impressed by the melodious Gurbani recited daily by Bibi Amro, he requested her to introduce him to her father, Guru Angad. When Bibi Amro took the elderly man to her father, he was received with great respect. Amar Das was transformed by the holy 'darshan' of the True Guru. Amar Das then served Guru Angad devotedly for as many as 13 years. Due to this devotion, He was ordained the 3rd Nanak at the age of 73 years by Guru Angad.

The ascendance of Guru Amar Das as the 3rd Nanak has been recorded in a composition in the Guru Granth Sahib (page 1395 – "*Aap Narayan Kaladhar Jag Mein Parvaroah...*"). It has been translated as follows: "*The Lord Himself wielded His Power and entered the world. The Formless Lord took form, and with His Light He illuminated the realms of the world. He is All-pervading everywhere; the Lamp of the Shabad, the Word, has been lit. Whoever gathers in the essence of the teachings shall be absorbed in the Feet of the Lord. Lehnaa, who became Guru Angad, and Guru Amar Daas, have been reincarnated into the pure house of Guru Nanak. Guru Amar Daas is our Saving Grace, who carries us across; in lifetime after lifetime, I seek the Sanctuary of Your Feet.*"

It is interesting to mention here that there was no direct familial relationship between Guru Nanak and His successor, Guru Angad. Similarly, there was no relationship between Guru Angad and the 3rd Nanak, Guru Amar Das. It was only devotion and common spirituality. And, more significantly, it was the "*Guru's Bani*" which was the binding factor. Similarly, the 4th Nanak, Guru Ram Das was recognized by His deep sense of duty to the Guru, but He became related to the 3rd Nanak through His marriage with Bibi Bhani, the daughter of Guru Amar Das.

Bibi Bhani served her father just like any son and thus firmly established the concept initiated by Guru Nanak that there need not be any discrimination on the basis of gender. Guru Amar Das had decided that His son-in-law, Bhai Jetha, would succeed him to the Gur Gaddi as the 4th Nanak (Guru Ram Das). However, Guru Amar Das did not disclose His intention to anyone. An interesting event is chronicled which can be looked at as a major transformation/turning point in Sikh history. Bibi Bhani was known for her devotion to the service of her Guru father. One morning, when Guru Sahib was in deep meditation, Bibi Bhani noticed one of the supports of the stool, on which Guru Sahib was seated, was about to give away. She felt that this would disturb Guru Sahib's meditation. Therefore to prevent this disturbance, she held up the stool by placing her hand below the stool to support it. When Guru Sahib completed His meditation, He was surprised to see the bleeding hand of His daughter. The injury had been sustained while holding up the stool. Guru Sahib blessed her and she made a fervent appeal to Him to grant her a Blessing. She requested Her father that henceforth the Gur Gaddi should remain in the Sodhi family into which she had been married. There is a popular belief that Guru Amar Das revealed to her the sufferings, which the future Guru Sahibans would have to undergo while propagating their religious ideals. Bibi Bhani was convinced that suffering would transform the Sikh community. Seeing her determination, Guru Amar Das granted her the blessing she had sought. Thus, after her husband, Guru Ram Das became the 4th Nanak; the succession remained in His family.

Again, according to the description by '*Satta and Balwand*' and recorded in the Guru

Granth Sahib (page 968 – *Dhan Dhan Ram Das Guru jin siriya thinae savaraya...*) the ascendance of Guru Ram Das as the 4th Nanak has been translated as follows: *"Blessed, blessed is Guru Ram Das; He who created you, has also exalted you. Perfect is your miracle; the Creator Lord Himself has installed you on the throne. The Sikhs and all the congregation recognize you as the Supreme Lord God, and bow down to you. You are unchanging, unfathomable, and immeasurable; you have no end or limitation. Those who serve you with Love – you carry them across. Greed, envy, sexual desire, anger and emotional attachment – you have beaten them and driven them out. Blessed is your place, and True is your magnificent glory. You are Nanak, you are Angad, and you are Amar Das; so do I recognize you. When I saw the Guru, then my mind was comforted and consoled."*

According to historians, the Blessings of Guru Amar Das in granting the fervent appeal made by his daughter led to the succession of Arjan, the youngest son, of Guru Ram Das, as the 5th Nanak.

Again, according to the description by '*Satta and Balwand*' and recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib – *car[jag[chu jugl p;caieNu Aap[h]Aa . [SGGS : 968]* the ascendance of Guru Arjan as the 5th Nanak has been translated as follows: *"The four Gurus enlightened the four ages; the Lord Himself assumed the fifth form. He created Himself, and He Himself is the supporting pillar. He Himself is the paper, He Himself is the pen, and He Himself is the writer. All His followers come and go; He alone is fresh and new. Guru Arjan sits on the throne; the royal canopy waves over the True Guru. From east to west, He illuminates the four directions. Those self-willed manmukhs who do not serve the Guru die in shame. Your miracles increase two-fold, even four-fold; this is the True Lord's true blessing. The four Gurus enlightened the four ages; the Lord Himself assumed the fifth form."*

Chroniclers have recorded the fact that when 'Mata Ganga' - Guru Arjun's consort - wanted to beget him an offspring, she was sent to Baba Budha Ji for his blessings. It is also recorded that this "*Brahmgyani Savant*" of the Guru had attained a stage where there was no difference between the God and the disciple, through his devotion, obedience and service to the Guru's court. Baba Budha Ji broke open an onion and gave 'Mata Ganga' the inner 'growing shoot' of the onion. She partook of this and was blessed with a son.

A composition of Guru Arjun announcing the birth of his son and recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib (page 396 –

Sat Guru Saache diya bhej, chir jiwan upajaya sanjog...) has been translated as follows: *"The True Guru has truly given a child. The long-lived one has been born to this destiny. He came to acquire a home in the womb, and his mother's heart is so very glad. || 1 || A son is born - a devotee of the Lord of the Universe. This pre-ordained destiny has been revealed to all. || Pause || In the tenth month, by the Lord's Order, the baby has been born. Sorrow is dispelled, and great joy has ensued. The companions blissfully sing the songs of the Guru's Bani. This is pleasing to the Lord Master. || 2 || The vine has grown, and shall last for many generations. The Power of the Dharma has been firmly established by the Lord. That which my mind wishes for, the True Guru has granted. I have become carefree, and I fix my attention on the One Lord. || 3 || As the child places so much faith in his father, I speak as it pleases the Guru to have me speak. This is not a hidden secret; Guru Nanak, greatly pleased, has bestowed this gift."* When Guru Arjan was martyred at Lahore, Hargovind succeeded his father, and became the 6th Nanak in the Sikh pantheon.

Guru Hargovind was not directly succeeded by his son but the next Guru, the 7th Nanak was Guru Hargovind's grandson, Har Rai. He was followed by his young -5 year old - son Guru Har Kishan, the 8th Nanak. When Young Guru Har Kishan fell victim to small pox infection in Delhi, He fulfilled His spiritual responsibilities by announcing that the next Guru was "His Baba – i.e. Grandfather" in "Bakala". This referred to the younger brother of his real grandfather, the younger son of the sixth Nanak

(Guru Hargovind) who had been sent to Bakala with his mother Mata Nanaki. Historians have recorded that as many as 33 claimants set up their institutions for recognition as the true inheritors/successors to the 8th Nanak. But, a devoted trader, Lakhi Shah Wanjara, recognized the True Guru and proclaimed that Tegh Bahadur was the 9th Nanak.

This story of succession - from Guru Nanak to Guru Tegh Bahadur - has been beautifully described by Guru Gobind Singh Ji in his famous composition "Bachittar Natak". Guru Sahib begins with the fact that Guru Nanak was born in the family of the "Bedis" (*Thin Bedian ki kul vikhe pragathe Nanak Rai...*) and He provided a universal message for his followers. During his lifetime, Guru Nanak recognized Angad who in turn recognized Amar Das. Then Amar Das passed on the "jyot" to Ramdas. It was the same "light or jyot" continuing from one Guru to the next. Ram Das passed on the Guruship to Arjan, and when Arjan departed from this mortal world, he was succeeded by Har Govind. Har Govind anointed Har Rai as his successor who was followed by Har Kishan. The successor to Har Kishan was Tegh Bahadur.

Guru Tegh Bahadur attained martyrdom at Delhi in 1675. Historians record the fact that his only young son, Gobind Rai, then barely nine, had recognized that there was none other than the Ninth Guru, who could help the 'Kashmiri Pandits' who had approached him when the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb was forcibly converting all Hindus to Islam. Thus when Guru Tegh Bahadur was martyred in Delhi (the present site of Gurudwara Sisganj), his son, succeeded him as the 10th Guru. In 1699, Guru Sahib initiated the 'Khalsa Panth' and after partaking in the 'Amrit ceremony' he was anointed 'Guru Gobind Singh'. Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the Tenth Master, installed the Holy scripture as His successor in 1708. This is recognized as a very important turning point in the history of the Sikh Religion. Historical chroniclers record the event as a direction to his followers at Nanded (Maharashtra) on the banks of the river Godavri. When Guru Gobind Singh realized that his end was approaching, his followers wanted to know who would be his successor? To this query, The Master replied the Sikhs should look to the Holy Granth Sahib for spiritual knowledge and to look at the Khalsa Panth to have a glimpse of their Guru.

In 1865, a historian, Munshi Sant Singh composed a verse to commemorate this last sermon of The Tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh, as follows:

AwigAw Bel Akwl kl qbl clwXo pMQ [
sB is'Kn ko hukm hY gurU mwinE gMRQ [
gurU gMRQ jI mwnXO pRgt gurW kl dyih [
jo pRB ko imlbo chY Koj Sbd mih lyih]

This verse is recited all over the world everyday, and serves as a reminder that the Sikhs have to respect the Guru Granth Sahib for their spiritual upliftment. The compositions included in this Holy Scripture provide enlightenment and guidance for all occasions. All Sikhs respect the Guru Granth Sahib because all the compositions embodied in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib as the Bani are revered as 'The Guru Eternal' or God Himself.

