

Guru Gobind Singh Ji and the Alchemy of Amrit

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Historians are unanimous on the point that the creation of the Khalsa on the Vaisakhi of 1699 A.D. was a momentous event which radically transformed society, particularly in Northern India. However, both the historians and political scientists have missed the point that this was the first exposition, enunciation, articulation and assertion of Human Rights in history - Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. The American and the French revolutions which adopted these concepts as slogans came much later.

The creation of the order of the *Khalsa* by Guru Gobind Singhji on March 30, 1699 (Vaisakhi), is one of the most significant landmarks in the history of modern India. The administration of *Amrit (Khanda Pahul)* and the raising of the Khalsa witnessed a miraculous transformation of a peace-loving community, engaged in meditation and service to fellow beings, into a heroic martial denomination of saint soldiers (*Sant Sipahi*), which has no parallel in human history. It is difficult to visualize a phenomenon of such magnitude in such a short time wherein a people broken in spirit and body, enslaved and exploited for centuries, became invincible warriors who devastated their erstwhile oppressors. This was the alchemy of Amrit: it worked wonders indeed.

The miracle wrought by Guru Gobind Singhji on that day revolutionized the lives of the masses. People hitherto exploited, abused, oppressed and utterly dehumanized were awakened and fired with a new zeal. Whereas the other resurgent movements born towards the latter part of the seventeenth century floundered and collapsed, the *Khalsa* continued to flourish and the boundless spirit generated in the wake of its formation continued to inspire people to seek martyrdom with awesome courage. However, this was to protect the weak and the deprived against tyranny, and not for self-aggrandisement or territorial gains.

The abysmal degradation and servility which had gripped the common man can be gauged from the reply of the Rajas of Shivalik to one of the communications of Guru Gobind Singhji which reads as under:

"Each Turk can eat a whole goat. How can we, who eat only rice, cope with such strong men? Can sparrows kill hawks, or jackals the tigers?"

Frequent invasions of India from the eleventh century onwards and the resultant bloodshed, massacres, arson, plunder and mass abduction of women, had shattered the morale of our countrymen. The plunder of the Somnath temple and the breaking of the idols therein, in 1026 A.D. by Muhammad Ghazni, was just one of the many sad and shameful episodes in the series.

The new breed of rulers and the ruling elite were generally fanatical and intolerant of the indigenous Hindus. The socio-religious policy followed by the monarchs during the medieval period has been appropriately spelt out in the oft-quoted conversation between Allaudin Khilji and the Kazi on the point. According to the Kazi, "Hindus are like the earth, if silver is demanded from them, they ought with greatest humility offer gold. And if a Mohammedan desires to spit into a Hindu's mouth, the Hindu should open it wide for the purpose...." Allaudin Khilji's response, that in that case he was following the correct policy, is indicative of the milieu prevailing in the medieval times. Rulers like Mohammad Tughlaq, Sher Shah Suri and Akbar were the exception, and not the rule.

Throughout the pre- Mughal period and, again, during the reign of Aurangzeb, sustained efforts were made to convert the Hindus to Islam by persuasion, allurements and even terror. However, in Aurangzeb's period, attempts at conversion to Islam became more vigorous, persistent and systematic and the tortures and persecution surpassed all previous records. This was particularly so in Kashmir which was considered to be the bastion of Hinduism. Left with no other choice except death, or conversion to Islam, the Kashmiri pandits approached Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib, the ninth Sikh Guru, for solace, succour and advice. After listening to their tale of woes, the Guru came to the conclusion that the mitigation of their plight called for the sacrifice of a pious man. Gobind Rai, the nine-year-old son of Guru Teg Bahadur, was present at the time. His spontaneous interjection at this point, that none other than the Guru was better suited for the purpose, is of particular import in this saga of heroism. Here was a young lad prepared to sacrifice everything dear to him, including his venerable father for a noble cause. Guru Teg Bahadur was greatly pleased at the reaction of Gobind Rai. He suggested to the Kashmiri pandits that they should inform Aurangzeb that the Hindus all over India would willingly adopt Islam provided Guru Teg Bahadur gave up his faith and became a Muslim. This was accordingly done.

When the Guru's message was conveyed to Aurangzeb, he saw in it an opportunity to accomplish his cherished goal. Guru Teg Bahadur was summoned by Aurangzeb and was arrested while he was on his way to Delhi. When all efforts to convert him to Islam failed, he was beheaded on November 11, 1675 at Chandni Chowk in Delhi at the place where Gurudwara Sis Gunj stands today.

The Guru's severed head and body lay for quite sometime and nobody dared to approach it for fear of death. However, sometime in the afternoon there was a heavy dust storm accompanied by thunder and lightning, which scared away the sentries standing on guard. Taking advantage of this, the head was picked up by a devout Sikh at great peril, and carried to Anandpur Sahib for performing the last rites, whereas the body was carried away by another equally devoted Sikh and cremated at the place where Gurudwara Rakabgunj stands.

When Guru Teg Bahadur's head was presented to Gobind Rai, who by then had become the Guru, and the conditions in which the revered head and body lay unclaimed for hours together were narrated to him, he resolved to infuse his followers with unbeatable and indomitable courage and to give them a distinct identity.

The period between 1675 and 1699 was the preparatory period, which Guru Gobind Singhji utilized for self-education, meditation and imparting intensive military training to his followers.

During this period, he composed great literary works and also fought several battles, of which the battle of Bhangni is the most significant. However, intensive military training, or writing of powerful epics alone was not enough to reinvigorate a people who had been victims of passivity and pusillanimity, verging on slavery, for centuries together. That called for innovation and full play of imagination of a superman of the stature of Guru Gobind Singhji.

The Vaisakhi of 1699 was chosen to accomplish this stupendous task and has become a landmark in history. In the huge congregation which had assembled on this day, Guru Gobind Singhji asked for the head of a Sikh for the fulfilment of his mission. This sent shock waves among the people assembled, some of whom began to doubt the sanity of the Guru. However, five devoted Sikhs got up reverentially, one after another, to comply with the wishes of the Guru. Blessed is the community that can throw up heroes ready to embrace death at the call of the Guru!

The Guru was overjoyed. He dressed the 'blessed five' in new robes and prepared *khande di pahul (amrit)* by stirring sweetened water with a double-edged dagger while reciting the holy hymns. He administered it to them and ushered them into the order of the Khalsa. This having been done, he requested them to give *Amrit* to him in turn, and initiate him into the order of the *Khalsa*. Verily an elite company of supermen was created from ordinary mortals.

The commonwealth of Khalsa was established. Guru Gobind Singhji became both the Guru and the disciple of the commonwealth. At a time when the equality of man was still a far cry, it is a tribute to his greatness that he submitted himself to the discipline of the Khalsa like any other Sikh, and became the first among the equals. *Wah Wah Gobind Singh aapay gur chela* (How wonderful Gobind Singh became both the Guru and the disciple). Those who had partaken of the *amrit* lost their previous identity and became 'singhs' (lions). Today all Sikh men and women have the suffix 'Singh and Kaur, respectively with their names. Of the five 'blessed ones' who came to be addressed as the five beloved ones (*punj piyaras*), three belonged to the lower castes. However, all of them became 'Singhs' and were equal after they entered the order of the Khalsa. "Recognise all human beings as the same (*Manas ki jat sabhe ekke pehchanbo*)," says Guru Gobind Singhji in his *Akaal Utsat*. Women, including those from the Guru's family also partook of *Amrit*. Mata Sahib Kaur, the Guru's wife got the title 'Mother' of the Khalsa because of her selfless devotion and dedication to the cause. The portrayal of mankind outlined in 'Akaal Ustat' stressing on the fundamental unity and similarity of the human race, irrespective of caste, creed, language, religion, geographical locations, colour or sex was given a practical shape.

The nectar or *amrit* alchemised the personality of the recipients. A new class of people was raised, a people who were prepared to 'do or die' and who were to usher in a new era; an era of equality in which people could think freely, act freely and aspire to live with dignity. This was the first enunciation, exposition and assertion of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity in modern times. The American and the French Revolutions, which adopted these concepts as slogans, came much later. But whereas people from all races, nationalities and communities, irrespective of colour or sex, could join the Order thus established. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity adopted by the French and American Revolutions applied only to the white man. Voltaire, and the Contractualist philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries whose writings had provided the theoretical basis and the inspiration for these revolutions, never visualized the

human race in its entirety. "Man is born free but is everywhere in chains," lamented Rousseau, the more modern of the contractualists, in his *magnum opus*, 'Social Contract'. But he too never thought of the plight of women and the Blacks. Interestingly, the Blacks in the otherwise liberal American society had to wait for equal rights till President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 which was followed by the fifteenth amendment to the federal constitution in 1870. Women in Europe had to wait till the twentieth century before they were enfranchised.

However, the Khalsa had to pay a heavy price in men and material to accomplish the goal. The four sons of Guru Gobind Singhji and his mother became martyrs for the cause. The atrocities committed on Mata Gujri the Guru's mother, and her two younger sons at Sirhind before they attained martyrdom are heartrending. However, the Guru remained resolute and unshaken in his conviction. He bore no malice towards the Muslim community to which, unfortunately, his perverse persecutors belonged. His faith in the Supreme benevolent God (*Akalpurakh*) and his conviction in the unity of the human race remained unshaken. '*Maanas ki jat sabh ek hi pehchanbo*' (Recognize all human beings as the same) remained his motto till the last. Both the Hindus and the Muslims continued to flock to him for spiritual guidance. The non-sectarian and the unorthodox movement which started in the times of Guru Nanak Devji, the first Guru, reached its culmination under his stewardship. No words are adequate to describe the greatness and achievements of Guru Gobind Singh.. Voluminous documents eulogizing his deeds and works cannot add an iota to his stature.

However, it is only appropriate to remember such guru prophets reverentially, and make honest efforts to emulate their examples, which, apart from enriching the personality of the individuals, will go a long way in national reconstruction and national solidarity. Communities and nations that deliberately ignore their heroes, or pay only lip service to them, suffer grievously and lose vitality. India and Sikhs have suffered on this count in the past. Let us not commit the same blunder hereafter.



Charisma of Guru Gobind Singh Ji

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"They are remarkably brave, superior in war to all Asiatics. They are remarkable for their simplicity and integrity, so reasonable as never to have recourse to a law-suit, and so honest as neither to require locks to their doors nor writings to bind their agreements. No Indian was ever known to tell an untruth."

This is the description the Greek historian and philosopher, Arrian, gives of the Indian character in ancient times.

India then fell on evil days. Prolonged spells of subjugation to foreign rule subverted the moral of the people and caused unbelievable national deterioration. Words, such as Arrian's, became the faint intimations of a remote, unreal past. But, centuries later, India exacted a tribute as magnificent as the one paid by Arrian and, in a way, even more significant.

The latter-day attester is not a friend, but an enemy - Qazi Nur Muhammad - who came to India with Ahmad Shah Durrani's seventh incursion into the country (1764-65) and was a witness to the Sikhs' battles with the invader. In his poetic account, in Persian, of the Durrani's invasion, he referred to the Sikhs in a rude and imprecatory language, but could not, at the same time, help proclaiming their many natural virtues. He said:

'Do not call them "dogs" [his contemptuous term for Sikhs] for they are lions, and are courageous like lions in the field of battle. How can a hero, who roars like a lion in the field of battle, be called a dog? If you wish to learn the art of war, come and face them in the field. They will demonstrate it to you in such a way that one and all will praise them for it... *Singh* is title [a form of address] for them.. If you do not know the Hindustani language, I shall tell you that the word *singh* means a lion. Truly, they are like lions in battle and, in times of peace, they surpass Hatim in generosity.'

'Leaving aside their mode of fighting, hear yet another point in which they excel all other fighting people. In no case would they slay a coward, nor would they put an obstacle in the way of a fugitive. They do not plunder the wealth and ornaments of a woman, be she a well-to-do lady or a maid-servant. There is no adultery among these "dogs" they do not make friends with adulterers and house-breakers.'

For a people engaged in a life-and-death struggle strictly to observe such scruples was proof of their extraordinary moral discipline. It seemed as if the gap of centuries had been made up. This resurrection of the national character was the result of the miracle wrought by Guru Gobind Singh.

The germ of this revolution lay in the Gospel of human dignity preached by Guru Nanak. Guru Gobind Singh brought to culmination the process of regeneration which had been started. He restored to the people, freshly enfranchised by the teachings of his predecessors, their spiritual certitude and their qualities of resoluteness and sacrifice, and revived their native energies. Judging from the cohesion he gave to the social fabric, and from the transcendent nature of his undertaking towards raising the plane of man's thinking and action, Guru Gobind Singh ranks as the most constructive and charismatic genius in world history.



Guru Gobind Singh's Vision of the Saint-Soldier

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Guru Gobind Singh had accepted armed resistance as the last resort. In his famous letter, *Zafarnamah*, to Emperor Aurangzeb, the Guru pointed out that he was not at all enamoured of conflict and had accepted it as a painful necessity.

He justified this step by saying when matters pass beyond all remedies, it is the right thing indeed to unsheath the sword. This was his vision regarding the war that he wanted his fellow countrymen to fight if they wanted to save their honour and dignity.

When he made his appearance on the scene, Guru Gobind Singh had before him a terrible picture of the country. He was called upon to save his people not only from the political bondage of cruel tyrants, but also liberate the souls of men and women who had been demoralised to an unimaginable extent. It seemed clear that unless freedom - political and social - was won for the people, it was difficult to rid the society of all the grave disabilities and exploitation that it suffered.

At the age of nine, the Guru lost his father, who was sacrificed in the fight for religious freedom. At that young age, he was surrounded by a hostile and powerful empire. Guru Gobind Singh emphasised on the moral approach to war that regards it as a means of perfecting individuals or society. He felt that people became virtuous by fighting for a just cause, which he called *Dharma Yudh*.

After meditating intensely on the sad state of contemporary society, Guru Gobind Singh came to the conclusion that to tyrannise was bad, but to suffer tyranny was worse. He wasn't dismayed, however. He knew that the human mind, when properly inspired, was capable of rising to the loftiest heights and, when rightly guided and controlled, could work wonders.

He realised that he would have to depend entirely on his own resources. He set about planning and preparing himself for the struggle to win justice for his people. His army was to be based on the principle of social justice. There could be no discrimination in the name of caste, creed and colour. His soldiers, unpaid, ill-armed, poorly equipped and not so well-trained, were to be inspired by feelings of patriotism and nationalism.

The Guru's vision of war was based on the concept of the saint-soldier. The true soldier is a saintly person and a true saint is a mighty warrior. The hero is a seeker of truth. He wages a war in order that good and innocent people might live in peace and enjoy reasonable happiness.

[Courtesy: *The Hindustan Times*]



The Saint-Soldier Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh Ji

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It was on the 1st day of the month of Vaisakh in Indian Calendar, that Guru Gobind Singh created the most amazing saint-soldier Khalsa by baptizing his followers in 1699. Hence it is called Vaisakhi or Baisakhi day. The instructions given on the occasion of 'Amrit' ceremony require description to explain the concept of saint-soldier Khalsa on the basis of the ideal of "first be willing to die, give up hope of living, be humble to all, then come to me" contained in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Gobind Singh arranged an extraordinary large congregation. He appeared on the stage, seemingly in a very serious and ferocious mood with three-foot long shining sharp edged *Kirpan* in one hand challenged the gathering. "I want to test this *Kirpan*. Is there any one who can give his head to me?" From the most stunned gathering stood up Bhai Daya Ram and offered himself for the test. The Guru took him inside the back stage. A swish sound of cutting flesh was heard. The Guru performed this terrifying act four times more, with all the more dramatic dexterity, to select four more persons.

But, after a few minutes, to the utmost surprise of all, the Guru presented all the five alive on the stage nicely dressed alike. What transpired in the back tent is not known for certain. These five were baptized with the specially prepared *Amrit* (Nectar of Immortality) by stirring double-edged *Khanda* (a long straight dagger sharp from both sides) in it, while reading the holy hymns. They were called *Khalsa*. Baptized persons were ordained to use the suffix of Singh (lion for males) with their names, and Kaur (princess) with the names of females. Thus Daya Ram became Daya Singh and Guru Gobind Rai became Guru Gobind Singh after taking initiation from the Five, whom he named *Panj-Piare* or Five Dear Ones. The *Khalsa*, the Singh, the *Khalsa* panth, the brotherhood of the pure ones, the fellowship of the pure ones, the beloved army of God, are largely synonymous terms. This is a common rhetoric that *Khalsa* was created out of the sharp edge of the double-edged *Khanda*. It refers to this unique *Amrit* ceremony.

The way the *Khalsa* was chosen clearly signifies death before death, voluntary death, death for righteousness, self-sacrifice for Guru, spiritual rebirth after temporal death and surrendering everything to Guru, including one's life. This concept is quite in consonance with Sikh tenets and the concept of the perfectly pacifist saint Guru Nanak, who said, "If you want to play the game of love (of God) then come forward by placing your head on the palm of your hand." This clearly indicates that the light to show the path for the creation of saint-soldier *Khalsa* was lit by Guru Nanak. Still earlier Bhagat Kabir also says in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, "Only he is to be recognized as a valiant, who fights for righteousness and he may die, cut limb by limb, but never retreats from the battlefield." Therefore, to be a saint, one must have unflinching faith in righteousness and to safeguard it he must be a valiant soldier.

The sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind also enunciated the concept of *Bhagti* and *Shakti* (spiritual power and temporal power) which is quite akin to the concept of saint-soldier. After the pacifist self-sacrifice of his father, Guru Arjun Dev for saving his religion, he wore two *Talwars* (swords) signifying that temporal power is essential for safeguarding righteousness. The ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur went still further and did something most amazing and unprecedented in history, when he made the supreme sacrifice of his life, not for saving his own religion, but for saving the religion of the Hindus. Therefore the creation of the *Khalsa*, who is perfectly an embodiment of a saint and a soldier, was a dire necessity of the times.

History has proved it that the credit goes to the saint-soldier Sikhs for facing and stopping the attacks on India by foreign invaders like the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali. A Persian scholar, qazi Nur Mohammad, was with Ahmad Shah Abdali during his seventh invasion of India. He makes a most abusive remark about the Sikhs, yet unintentionally he also offers a most appreciative and true tribute to the high character of the saint-soldier Sikhs. He says in his book *Jangnama*, "Don't call these dogs, dogs. In fact they are lions. In the battlefield they are like brave lions. They don't attack the cowards and runaways from the battlefield, though they may be their enemy. They never disgrace women and never snatch their ornaments; she may be a maidservant or a queen. In the pack of these dogs no one is a rapist and they never commit a theft."

It will also be of great interest to the readers to know about some vows that are told to the persons when they are 'baptized'. Apart from not cutting the hair, not using intoxicants and tobacco, they are also told, "From today you have a new birth. You have joined *Khalsa Panth*. The name of your spiritual father is Guru Gobind Singh and your mother is Sahib Kaur Ji (Guru Gobind Singh's consort) your place of birth is Kesgarh Sahib (the Gurdwara in Anandpur Sahib town, where Guru Gobind Singh 'baptized' the Sikhs in 1699) and you are resident of Anandpur Sahib. Being the sons of the same father, you all are brothers. By abandoning your previous religion, caste, occupation, birth, country, you have become only Khalsa." For example, a person born in Vancouver becomes spiritually the resident of Anandpur Sahib and the son of Guru Gobind Singh.

Is it not something very amazing? Is this idea not akin to one of the best dreams for promoting the idea of world village, world commonwealth, complete harmony, mutual understanding, love, and equality all over the world?



Kirpan - Its true import & significance

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Sr. Kashmir Singh of the British Sikh Federation recently observed on UK's Radio 4: "It is a God-given right for all persons to be able to defend themselves, with upto date arms. It is a Constitutional Right in the USA for all its citizens to bear fire-arms (guns); it is a requirement in Switzerland for all its able bodied citizens to keep fire-arms and ammunition at home, as part of national defence, and to take part in regular training and war games (Hola Mohalla as started by Guru Gobind Singh), in order to keep their skills up to date. No country has dared to attack Switzerland for hundreds of years, because all it's citizens are soldiers, e.g. Nazi Germans or the Soviet Union did not dare to attack."

What Sr. Kashmir Singh writes, reminds me to say something I have been meaning to say for some time about the Sikh *Kakars*. Guru Gobind Singh Ji formalised the 5 Ks for the Khalsa from Vaisakhi 1699, although, these had already become part of the Sikh way of

life since Guru Hargobind Ji, who addressed the Sikhs as his *Khalsa* in his *Hukamnamas*. (I make my point about the Kirpan in the final paragraph - it is an important point, especially for the young Khalsa today, more so after the events following 11th September, and the goings on in Leeds, etc.)

The Sikh way of life - *maryada* - evolved over 200 years, from Guru Nanak Sahib to Guru Gobind Singh Ji. It is almost certain that due to the close connection - synergy - became natural (*sabat surat*) human form and a spiritual disposition, most devoted Sikhs kept their hair unshorn. Most *bhagats* or holy men, who preached life affirming ideologies, almost certainly kept their hair tidy and unshorn, i.e. not matted like the drop-out, opt-out *yogis* who were not householders. That invariably meant keeping a handy comb to keep them tidy.

Few who wielded the sword alongside Guru Hargobind Ji would have worn the loose *dhoties* but the traditional warrior shorts, the *Kacchera* which ancient warriors in India wore, e.g., you do not see mythical warriors depicted in pictures, like Hanuman, wearing loose *dhotis* but versions of agile *kaccheras*.

Again, nothing novel about warriors wearing iron bracelets (*kara*) on their arms. Just look at some old drawings of the Akalis or Nihangs. Not one *Kara* but several *karas* on both arms. (*Chakars* - quoits over *dastars* and *karas* on arms). Iron *karas* were always worn by ancient warriors. The sword, the purpose of which Guru Ji made clear by renaming it "*kirpan*" (the "benevolent protector of honour") was almost certainly always carried or worn by many Sikhs decades before the Vaisakhi day in 1699.

Indeed Guru Hargobind Ji referred to his Sikhs as his Khalsa in his *Hukamnamas*. It was a term signifying direct attachment with the Guru. No intermediaries, the *masands* and scholarly preachers, sent out by the Gurus had any right to the devotion of the Sikhs. In Sikhism, Khalsa must always be interpreted in that direct "Guru-Sikh" relationship and no other. "Khalsa" is a land law term used for the sovereign's own personal land (as opposed to land given to subservient nawabs, rajahs, jagirdars, etc under the feudal system, i.e. lands held in fee). So Khalsa is of the Guru, the Guru, the Enlightener ultimately is the True Guru, Akal Purakh. So the Khalsa is of Waheguru, "*Waheguru Ji ka Khalsa*" and the ultimate victory is also of the Guru, "*Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh*."

The five Ks are not 'symbols'. They are more than "articles of faith": they are an essential part of the Khalsa's way of life made mandatory by Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

Returning to my main point: The Khalsa's *Kirpan* is an "extension" of the physical human body and the invisible/invincible human spirit - the focus and focal point of a Sikh's physical and spiritual (*miri-piri*, in that order) energy. Only to that extent is it a "symbol". If, at any age, I cannot feel that I can take on with confidence any being who is attacking those I am entrusted to defend (including my own honour) then I have failed my Guru. A *kirpan* weighs over a kilo, can I wield it, swing it around at speed with the right footwork? - if not, why not? Did Baba Deep Singh Ji, at 70 years plus, not swing the mighty double-edged sword in battle? There must be a good reason, otherwise I have failed my Guru's instruction to be "*Tiar barr tiar Khalsa*."

So, Khalsa Ji, please do not let the Kirpan become just a symbol or even an article of faith for display - it may be both but it is a real weapon of defence. When it is taken away from me, it is still there in my spiritual hand (yes, then perhaps a symbol or an article of faith only) on which I focus, but the rest of the body and mind are still there! So let no Sikh ever feel "unarmed" or without a "*kirpan*", when the combination of a strong agile body and an invincible spirit is there. That requires daily exercise and practice of self-defence movements. Sikh centres, like those maintained by the Guru Sahiban from Guru Angad Dev Ji onwards, must ensure proper training/exercise facilities.

We should fight the legal battle for a Sikh's religious right to wear a *Kirpan*, but we must always strive not to part with the "*kirpan*" of body/mind combination as *sant-sipahis* of the Guru. The art of *gatka* for hand/body movements is our great heritage; all Sikh children should learn it and never feel defenceless under any circumstance.

Wearing the *kirpan* of the Guru would be true homage to "*Kirpan*", the gift of the Guru. We know what we faced in the streets of these countries when we arrived in the early nineteen sixties. In 1984, were the Sikhs of Delhi wearing their "*kirpans*" when they were caught and burnt alive? So, are you wearing your "*kirpan*" today, or is it just a symbol and an article of faith for show?



The Cult of "Nihang Singhs"

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Legend has it that Sikhs under stress in the eighteenth century created the Order of Nihang "Singhs" - in order to counteract the imperialist Mughals, in particular to stop the abduction of young Indian girls taken away by invaders to Persia and Afghanistan to be sold as slaves.

Apart from a neat allegory typical of the *jung boli* (war language) of the time, the selection of the "crocodile," the ultimate ambush-predator may indicate something of the nature of the Sikh art of war against evil impulses.

Nihang, the crocodile, is not a hungry beast, since it needs only one meal in a year to survive; its stomach is only the size of a human head. It only shows 1% of its size in the seconds before it strikes. It is an ancient species, basically unchanged in 250,000,000 years. It was the eminent predator in water systems before, during and after the dinosaurs. A couple of crocodiles will frighten off a pride of lions, the hide is hard to penetrate and the bite pressure is enormous. It has, apparently, the most advanced heart in the world, capable of functioning at two speeds; it lives for 100 years; it is a wary beast.

The saint is not hungry for the world, but makes use of it to live well. While overflowing with love, the saint may speak of love, yet the depths are hidden. The Guru contrasts the empty vessel

making a great deal of noise, with the full vessel which makes little noise.

The path of the saint is one and unchanging through time - the way of grace (*gurmat*) is best in the beginning, through and ages and for all times. Even a brief *sangat* of loving individuals will change the atmosphere around them. Hunters may gather to tear them up, but will be daunted by them. In humbleness, emptiness before God, drawing close to God, the saint is unmoved by the cruelty of the world. In opposing evil, his mind is not confused by the calculations of the world, but the warm strings of love play unstruck music in the heart. It tears open space and time, for all space (*Khalsa*) belongs to the Master, and all time (*Akali*) belongs to the One beyond time. The stories of any age and the mechanisms of power are as puddles that wash against a huge mountain. It functions as saint and soldier, for a true saint is a soldier, one that loves God in all cannot neglect to actively love all, cannot abandon them to harm and oppress. A creature that lives from the heart recognises only fear of its maker; all else is but the lap dancing of the puddle. Yet recognition that it is loved, and is supported in goodness to prevent it from harm, leads it to avoid unnecessary risks and take easy victories. It has been made to be victorious and to cry tears of joy, over tears of regret.



Dastaar: The Turban glory of Sikh

Dr. Harjinder Singh Dilgeer

Today, the very sight of turban reminds one of the Sikh nation. Turban is an essential [integral] part of a Sikh's dress. It is obligatory for a Sikh. Although initiation of the Sikhs dates back to the last days of the seventeenth century, the turban for a Sikh is as old as the religion itself. Right from Guru Nanak Sahib (1469-1539), the founder of the Sikh religion, the turban has been an inseparable part of the being of a Sikh.

Though turban is a religious obligation for the Sikhs, it has been integral to the costume of the people of Asia, as well as a part of the attire of the saints and sages in the Sikh Homeland. According to some sources, even Hazrat Mohammed Sahib, the founder of Islam, used to wear a similar headgear.

It has not yet been established whether the *Dastaar* (turban) of a Sikh and turban of the Middle east (Dulband), have a common origin. In Persian, turban is "Dulband" and in Turkish it is "Tulband". Turkish "Tulband" became "Turbante" in Italian, "Turbant" in French and "Turban" in English. The Sikhs appreciate the use of the term *Dastaar*, instead of "Turban".

Europe knew turban even prior to the fifteenth century. An oil painting by Jan Van Eyck, with the caption "a man in a turban" dates back to c. 1433. (this painting has been preserved in the National Gallery at London). For a Sikh, "*Dastaar*" (turban) is not a headgear but it is a (integral) part and parcel of his religion. It is representative of the religious identity and national cohesion for the Sikh Nation. A Sikh with a "*Dastaar*" is conspicuous among the crowds of thousands. About four and a half meters (5 yards) of lightly starched, fine cotton muslin cloth is usually used for a Sikh's "*Dastaar*". The width of this cloth is about one and a quarter meter. Some variations do exist and some people use seven meters of slightly dense cotton cloth

(Voile), instead of finer material with starch. A smaller dastaar, about one and a half to two meters in length and smaller width, is also worn under the "*Dastaar*". This is known as *Keski* which became obligatory.

Turban has significance not only in the Sikh religion, but also in the Sikh way of life commonly known as the *Panth Parvaanit Maryada*, or the Sikh Code of Conduct, approved and sealed by the Supreme Seat of Sikh Polity, Akal Takht Sahib.

After the death of the head of a family, the eldest son is presented a turban, symbolising grant of the honour and dignity of the family, as well as the responsibilities of the family. On the occasion of marriage, the fathers or close relatives of the bride and the groom, present turbans to each others as symbolic of shared social esteem and dignity. In the Sikh homeland, good friends of long standing, present turbans to each other implying the message that they will be brothers-in-religion, henceforth. Among some Sikh families, "*Dastaar-bandi*" (tying of a turban) of the children is observed as a special ceremony.

Dastaar is a part and parcel of Sikhism and several idioms have become associated with this. Most of these denote great humiliation or disrespect, when a turban is disturbed or knocked off. Removing a Sikh's turban constitutes a grave offence. A Sikh, guilty of disrespect towards another Sikh's turban, is not allowed to join the Sikh ceremonies, unless he expressly apologises and carries out the punishment prescribed for the offence. (*Rahitnama*: Kesar Singh Chhibber).

In several countries, the Sikhs had to fight several times to retain their right to wear turbans. The first such battle was in England, the famous "Mandla case." In Norway, the Sikhs had to fight for their right to get a passport with a photograph in a turban. Later, in Norway again, the Sikhs had to struggle to be allowed to drive taxicabs while wearing a turban. In Sweden, the Sikhs had to fight [struggle] hard for their right to wear turban while serving in local railways. In Canada, the Sikhs had to launch an agitation to get permission to wear turban in police [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] forces and armed forces. India has never helped the Sikhs in their "adoptive/chosen" lands, at any time, for preservation of any religious right of the Sikhs. On the contrary, examples abound where the Hindus have actively lobbied against the Sikhs' religious rights, particularly in Canada, the USA and the United Kingdom.

Turban, for a Sikh, is not an optional piece of clothing, but it is an essential and integral part of the Sikhs's religious belief and their way of life. It is an article of faith.

