

Guru Gobind Singh Ji's Circadian Apotheosis of Divinity@

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@ From the book *The Khalsa: Substratum, Substance and Significance*, edited by Satish K Kapoor, published by (2001) Centre of Historical Studies, Lyallpur Khalsa College, Jalandhar City.

Guru Nanak's advent in the 15th century was an historic event of far-reaching consequence, thrown up in the world by Providence, to fill the vacuum that the breakaway modernist sensibility created in the firmament of existing religions. At any rate, it cannot be denied that a worthwhile life is not possible to live *without* ultimate convictions – for even the sceptic is *convinced* that everything is doubtful! Guru Nanak's *Bani*, the Revealed Word, posits an evolutionary development of religion, which only reached monotheism, considered to be the highest form of religious belief, after a long period of purification. The Guru's Revelation is all-encompassing; while satisfying the scientific temper, it acknowledges God (Ek Onkar) as an Active Principle of "Creative Mysticism" – in palpable immanence in the three-pronged act of creation, operation/preservation, and destruction, encompassing countless universes, persons, objects, places, events, etc. **By the irresistible power of his pragmatic spiritualism, Guru Nanak puts man in the service of mankind as an active agent through which Vah-i-Guru (God, the Wondrous spiritual Preceptor) carries out His (Inscrutable) Will – by generous dispensations of grace and mercy.** By so doing, the Guru awakens man to the intrinsic responsibility and accountability he must own and shoulder as an individual, human person. He thus holisticises man into a humble servitor, but conscious and grateful, who willingly gives up pursuit of personal salvation for the sake of the many-splendoured "game of Love" which, in total surrender and life-sacrifice, rewards the seeker, (the soul-bride) with the Divine Husband's endowments of sat (Truth, as unchangeable steadfastness and fortitude), *chit* (Consciousness, of one's assigned place in the scheme of things), and *anand* (bliss, of socially-beneficent action fulfilled in motiveless service).

The seed sown by Guru Nanak in the fertile soil of divinised ethics (with its insistence on good moral conduct **as the only convincing demonstration of being a *gurmukh*, (God-oriented) promptly struck root and rapidly grew into a full-grown tree of pragmatic spiritualism which fructified in the establishment of the Khalsa, as a commonwealth of saint-soldiers.** The intervening events, which nurtured its need, and nature, must be mentioned. The boonful beauty of the "game of love" was first demonstrated by Guru Arjun Dev, the Prince of martyrs, who, during the ruthless tortures and atrocities perpetrated on his person at the behest of Mughal Emperor Jahangir, savoured the sweetness of God's "Edict-Fiat" (*bhana*) as a rare dispensation of Divine Grace. His son, Guru Hargobind, thus, felt impelled to bring out the hitherto unmanifest dimension of Guru Nanak's new faith: **the providential sacrosanctity of one's right to self-defence against unprovoked aggression by taking up arms.** This far-sighted initiation of the *miri-piri* (a meditative welding of the temporal or secular and the spiritual or religious powers within the self-same Faith) concept was a crucial stage in the development of the Sikh ideal of total man (*mard-i-kamil*).

The "game of love" wrought a steely icon of pragmatic spiritualism in the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, who, unlike his illustrious grandfather, laid down his life voluntarily – for the preservation of Hindu dharma which was threatened with total extirpation at the hands of the bigoted and barbarian Aurangzeb, the self-styled promoter of Islam. The Guru left a

message for his nine-year old son, Gobind Rai, which read: **As willed by the Akal Purakh (Immutable Being) I am leaving for Delhi to lay down and sacrifice my life for religious freedom. You are to see that my body is not put to disgrace and that it is cremated properly and with all due honours. I am bequeathing the leadership of the Faith to you. You should carry it out gloriously, even if it would cost your life...**" (*Saints of India, Part III, p. 78*)

Guru Nanak's unique Faith saw its climax in the founding of the Khalsa on Baisakhi day in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh, the last spiritual successor of the founder. The choice of the day for the hallowed act brings out the great significance of Baisakhi in terms of the pre-eminent events in Sikh history which took place on this day: (1) Guru Nanak started his missionary travels (*udasis*), (2) the digging of a *baoli* (stepped well) at Khadur Sahib was undertaken – and water was also filled, and (3) Guru Harkrishan passed away. But before the concept and the spiritual/secular details of the Khalsa are delineated, it is imperative to know something about its founder, Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

According to Dr. Dewan Singh, "Guru Gobind Singh figures in world history as a great leader of men, a versatile genius of the highest order, a God-man and mystic par excellence, a redoubtable warrior and an adept strategist, a fearless revolutionary, a classical hero of Carlylian description, a powerful poet and patron of poets, a unique religious law-giver and champion of the downtrodden, a relentless defender of faith and an all-sacrificing martyr for the cause of suffering and persecuted humanity. In fact, it is impossible to encompass and delineate in words all the facts of his highly charismatic and remarkable personality."

Biographical Sketch: Guru Tegh Bahadur was on a tour of Bengal and Assam when a son was born to Mata Gujri at Patna on Saturday night of 17-18 Poh of 1723 Bikrami (corresponding to December 1666). In deference of the Guru's wishes, the son was named Gobind Rai. When he grew up to boyhood, his favourite pastime was to divide his playmates into two groups pitting one against the other in mock battles. He had a marked fondness for the sling, and the bow and arrows. The future Guru was fearless from his very childhood. Besides receiving instruction in religious matters, he was trained in warfare and horse-riding. He subsequently acquired proficiency in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Hindi and his mother tongue, Punjabi. He spent his spare time in hunting and travelling.

Personality: Guru Gobind Singh ascended Guru Nanak's spiritual throne at the age of 9 in 1675 when his illustrious father's martyrdom earned Guru Tegh Bahadur the unique title of "*Hind di Chadar*" (India's protective sheet-cover). Guru Gobind Singh was a true anchorite and an impassioned patriot. He was an embodiment of all-round perfection; a poet, a spiritual leader, a religious and social reformer, a far-sighted planner, a wise counsellor, a redoubtable warrior, and a superb general – above all, "an unflagging champion of his people, an unrivalled martyr of his country." He deeply imbibed the divine attributes delineated by Guru Nanak in his *Mul Mantra* (creedal statement), notably, "without fear, without enmity". These traits imparted to the Guru an invincible valour and an unshakable steadfastness. Daulat Rai exhorts his readers to "**visualize the valiant stand taken by the Guru and his forty Sikhs against the Imperial hordes at Chamkaur. The entire History of the world cannot offer its peer**". Dr. Dewan Singh writes in his Foreword to Rai's biography of Guru Gobind Singh: "*Sahib-e-Kamaal*" (which means a Perfect-Man): "Daulat Rai, now a very popular and famous name in Sikh circles, was a man of deep thinking and impartial religious conviction. Though an Arya Samajist himself, he was completely free from religious bias. Though he wrote in 1901 when the Punjab was seething with inter-religious wrangling and communal friction of an invidious nature, he was a rare person

who evinced in his *Biography of Guru Gobind Singh* a highly patriotic and national feeling by transcending all parochial limitations.” Published by Gurmat Sahit Charitable Trust (Regd. Office: Bazar Mai Sewan, Amritsar) this biography in Urdu has been competently abridged and sensitively translated by Prof. Surinderjit Singh. I can vouch that I haven’t so far read anything of this kind on Guru Gobind Singh. It has moved me to the very marrow of my bones. Unless otherwise stated, therefore, the quotes in the following paragraphs are drawn from this source – whose literary richness and spiritual inspiration I am unable to match.

“A man blessed with such a heart had not taken birth in India (among Hindus) for thousands of years ... His patriotic fervour boiling over contrasted with the chilling cowardice and utter despondency of the people... It was the spark of nationalism and the fighting instinct of a *kshatriya* In the heart of Guru Gobind Singh was lit the spark of nationalism which all earlier Hindu reformers including Krishna, Ramachandra, Shankaracharya and Ramanuja had lacked ... Their (the Hindus) existence was like the flickering light of a dying lamp. The flickering light was about to be extinguished by the stream of intolerant fanaticism let loose by Aurangzeb when Guru Gobind Singh shielded it with his hands and saved it from extinction (being extinguished) ... The Hindus were like a lamp without oil He (Guru Gobind Singh) was the first man to think of nationalism and to forster feeling of nationalism among the Indian people ...”

The 14-year-long period (1675-1699) of spiritual leadership gave Guru Gobind Singh the much-needed opportunity to study at first hand the prevalent situation and to size up the formidable might of the Mughals, and the invidious intrigues of the hill Rajas repeatedly planned and implemented in pursuit of selfish motives against the larger national interest vis-à-vis the abject helplessness, pitiable plight, and deep-rooted psycho-emotional-spiritual weakness of the Hindus. It was a self-imposed exile into the tangled forests of the national psyche beset with confusion, cowardice, casualness, and cantankerousness. He thought up with incredible foresight a master plan for the masses – moral rejuvenation, social upliftment, spiritual illumination, and physical health. He carefully fixed his priorities – and aimed his first shot at the removal of the causes responsible for disunity, despondency, and debility among the Hindus. These will be briefly dealt with to show how they form the all-important ground for the birth of the Khalsa.

Religious Reform: Carl Jung, a co-researcher with Sigmund Freud, father of modern psychology, has held that religious sentiment among the people of the world is the most formidable, forceful and durable of all human emotions. According to him, it is saner to deploy religion to effect the desired changes in human society than to write it off as primitive passion in a fit of pseudo-scientific temper. Guru Gobind Singh instinctively took up religion as his first priority. “From the very beginning,” says Daulat Rai, “the Hindus have held the dharma as supreme, a pious binding duty nearer to the heart than everything else.” But, over the centuries, the many “isms” like polytheism, pantheism, monism, with their plethora of rituals, rites, myths, and conflicting religious practices developed ever-widening sectarian differences which eventually led to disunity, friction, and animosity among the Indian masses. The position of religious sects and sub-sects had worsened, with their numbers rising to thousands – but leading to the dark alleys of blind-faith exclusivism. It should be noted that in a state of such widespread conflict, anyone trying to prove the supremacy of his cult must invariably distort the truth – and use fair means or foul to gain one-upmanship over his adversary, whether real or imaginary, just doesn’t matter! Obviously, all sorts of malpractices and superstitions creep into the system whose very purpose of spiritual illumination gets self-defeated.

Guru Gobind Singh corrected this massive malaise by preaching Guru Nanak's gospel of Ek Onkar, (One Supreme Being) and forcefully rebutted the plurality of godhead, forbade idolatry, censured the custom of observance of obsequies (*shradhs*), denounced the concept of *avatars*, condemned *tirath yatra* (pilgrimage) and bathing at holy places, criticized the religious garbs as dresses of deceit and drew people away from "small, slimy, stagnant and filthy fountains to the shores of the infinite ocean of (One) Lord-devotion." **The ground for national unity, integrity, and patriotism was thus prepared by the Guru with spotlight spiritual illumination, thereby restoring to the individual human person the organic completeness of an awakened, self-sufficient, inner life. Consequently, he was able to effect sweeping changes in the religious sphere.**

Social Reform: Guru Gobind Singh set out to restructure the social set-up with similar single-mindedness and dedication. In the four-tier society of *Brahmins*, *khatris*, *vaishyas*, and *shudras* – in which vertical movement was forbidden, thanks to code of Manu that had made it a legal binding that the high castes could press the *shudras* into menial service (as an act of god's prescription) but the food cooked by them was not to be touched. Made irrevocably applicable among the Indian society – on the analogy of the human body with *Brahmin* representing the head, the *khatri* the arms, the *vaishya* the stomach, and the *shudra* the feet – under the *Brahmins* the observance and hold of Manu's injunctions had been tightened to an inhuman degree. The *shudras* were thus the perennial victims of this heinous social injustice. To wit, "if a *shudra* talks of religious matters to a *Brahmin*, molten lead or boiling oil should be poured into his mouth and ears." (Manu *smriti*, chapter VIII (272). "The atonement for the killing of a *shudra* is the same as that for killing of a cat or a dog or a frog or a lizard or other animals."

Daulat Rai writes, **"The farsighted and sagacious Guru held it imperative to lift the low castes to the level of the high ones, so that the former could regain their sense of dignity and manhood and work for national reconstruction instead of just doing menial chores for the high castes.** During the days of brahmanic ascendancy the plight of the *shudra* was very miserable. They were treated at par with cattle and beasts of burden, though they were the original inhabitants of the country. There is no doubt that they were worse off than the ancient slaves that were bought and sold like animals". Proclaiming the essential equality, fraternity and liberty of all human beings (as their birthright) in his succinct tenet, "The caste of all mankind is only one: Humanism," Guru Gobind Singh felt it necessary that "the Hindus who had become slaves mentally and physically, should be jolted out of their miserable stupor. The sad plight of the Hindus in the political field was largely responsible for this predicament."

Daulat Rai highlights that "Guru Gobind Singh took up the challenge and created such a virile, upright and one-God-loving people like the Sikhs who were ever ready to lay down their lives for their country, people and dharma, who always came to the succour of the needy, the tyrannized and the downtrodden. He changed cowards into men of great courage, uncowed by the Muslim might. He surveyed the country and selected the people and the area where he was to put into practice his grandiose schemes. The selection of the area was determined by the kind of men inhabiting therein."

Guru's Tenets: Guru Gobind Singh sought to establish (and succeeded in doing so) two basic principles: (1) universal brotherhood without any distinction, and (2) the spirit of self-sacrifice for others without demur. It was crystal clear to him that "the feeling of brotherhood can only dawn after the annihilation of all (man-made) artificial barriers between man and man. The baneful caste-system introduced by Manu and followed with a vengeance by the Brahmins had to be nullified."

Foundation of the Khalsa: For Guru Gobind Singh, this unprecedented historic event was like home-coming from a 14-year-long (self) exile to the native truth of the entire 17th-century situation of Mughal-ruled India. He decided to establish the Khalsa; the Commonwealth of saint-soldiers, welded by the steely sense of oneness in total surrender and devotion to *Akal Purakh* – and imbibing His attributes of fearlessness and rancour-freeness, filled with the fiery ideal of self-sacrifice for the protection and welfare of others. Such an order of ever-ascendant spirits (*charhdi kala*) alone could demolish the centuries-old barriers of caste and creed, high and low, man and woman, thereby paving the way for the advent of nationalism, and the unity and integrity of India. The Khalsa, as the fraternity of the fearless and the forceful, alone could bring about the downfall of the foreign rule of bigotry and tyranny.

Accordingly, on the Baisakhi of Samvat 1756 (1699 A.D.), Guru Gobind Singh gathered his Sikhs in great numbers from across the entire length and breadth of the country at an open tract of land at Anandpur Sahib. A huge tent and an enclosure had been set up in the field. The remaining account of the ceremony and events is too well known to need recounting. However, it is necessary to underscore the two-fold purpose in the strange manner the Guru acted in inviting volunteers, at the point of a blood-dripping sword, from among the massive congregation. The first aim was to test if the Sikhs had the mighty mettle to sacrifice their all for the protection of their *dharma* and the love of their land. The second was to show to all those assembled there that only men like the *Panj Piaras* (the Five Beloveds) could successfully undertake the stated uphill task without demur. The five willing volunteers, who readily placed themselves – body, mind and soul – at the service of the Guru were: (1) Daya Ram, a Khatri from Lahore (2) Dharm Chand, a jat from Delhi; (3) Himmat Rai, a potter from Jagannath Puri in Orissa; (4) Mohkam Chand, a tailor from Kathiawar in Gujarat; and (5) Sahib Chand, a barber from Mysore.

The Guru was immensely delighted at the volunteers' valiant offer, and addressing the congregation, said: "During the time of Guru Nanak, only Bhai Lehna passed the gruelling test of Sikhism and he was exalted as Guru Angad Dev. But during the present terribly trying time, five courageous Sikhs have not only passed the test but also come out in flying colours." The message was that what the *Panj Piare* had done, they all could do. The Guru had successfully sown the seed of self-sacrifice in the minds of the Sikhs.

Now he turned to its germination, growth, and blossoming into wholesome action. They were then prepared for baptism at the Guru's court that he held in the fort of Kesgarh. He dressed the Five in a special uniform and armed them with weapons. Having done so for himself as well he asked for water from the river flowing below. This water was poured in a steel receptacle to which sugar puffs (*patashas*) were added. Guru Gobind Singh himself recited the *Five Banis* and stirred the contents all the while with his *khanda* (double-edged sword). He called the preparation *amrit* (Elixir of Life or Eternal-life-giving Nectar). The *amrit* was administered to the Five Beloved thus: Five times the Guru took out five handfuls of *amrit* and made the Five partake of them, while six of them (including the Guru) shouted "Wahiguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wahiguru Ji Ki Fateh (The Khalsa belongs to the Wondrous Guru (GOD) whose victory also lies with Him). The Five Beloveds were, then, asked to administer the *amrit* to the Guru. This ceremony was termed "*pahul*", and the consecrated casteless brotherhood of saint-soldiers was conferred the unique title of "The Khalsa", and their *dharma* called the Khalsa Panth. Their birth-castes were finally dissolved into their new spiritual birth by adding the suffix "Singh" (lion) to their first names. The women on being inducted into the Khalsa fold are given the surname "Kaur" (lioness).

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