

Martyrdom of Guru Arjun Devji: A Watershed in Indian Religious Tradition

*Jamna Singh, IRTS (Retd.)**

* Chief Commercial Manager, Indian Rlys. (Retd.) E-91, Sainikpuri Secunderabad. 500 094(Andhra Pradesh)

The lives of Gurus have shown, by practice and precept, how spirituality can be integrated with the social and moral fabric of work-a-day society. All of them had families while engaging in the highest form of spiritualism even as they performed the worldly duties. Renunciation, asceticism and celibacy were neither considered to be the prerequisites of saintliness nor supposed to confer any special merit. *Miri-piri* (control over the worldly affairs and spirituality) became an essential feature of the Sikh ethos from the time of its founder, Guru Nanak Devji. However, consequent upon the martyrdom of Guru Arjun Devji, on May 30, 1606, the term acquired a new dimension and a crucial significance.

Turning Point: The heart rending execution of Guru Arjun Devji in Lahore and the casting away of his tortured body into the river Ravi in full view of his followers left deep scars on their minds and transformed their psyche. They started donning arms with the resolve to defend themselves and their faith and to uphold righteousness against such outrages. The martyrdom of Guru Arjun Devji was thus a turning point in the annals of Sikh history.

Foreseeing the coming events, Guru Arjun Devji had already included the training in arms in the education of his son, Hargobind who had often gone on sporting expeditions during the lifetime of his father. Up to the time of Guru Arjun Devji, the revered Baba Buddhaji used to tie the ceremonial turban around the head of the Gurus and present a *seli* (rosary) to them at the time of their anointment as Gurus. However, considering the changed circumstances, on his accession to the '*gur-gaddi*', Guru Hargobind Sahib reverentially returned the '*seli*' to Baba Buddhaji and instead requested for two swords; one representing *miri* (royalty) and the other, *piri* (spirituality). Akal Takht, the seat of the timeless, facing Harmandir Sahib, was constructed where the Guru started holding court of dispense with both religious and secular affairs.

Though the earlier Gurus were adept in horse riding and some of them also knew the use of the arms, none of them had wielded the arms, which Guru Hargobind Sahib started doing with alacrity. According to the Sikh folklore, on one occasion, he saved the life of Emperor Jehangir, who by then had become an admirer of the Guru, from the sudden attack of a ferocious tiger by killing it with his sword. In the early years of the reign of Shahjehan, the Guru's forces fought a number of battles against the Mughal armies in which the Guru's forces were victorious.

Thus, with the martyrdom of Guru Arjun Devji, started the transformation of Sikhism, which by the end of the seventeenth century became a force to be reckoned with and shook the foundations of the oppressive and iniquitous Mughal rule in the north.

Intrigue at the Mughal Court: Towards the end of his reign, Akbar was an unhappy man and was disgusted with the waywardness of his son, Prince Salim, particularly after the treacherous murder of Abul Fazal. The things came to such a pass that he even contemplated naming his grandson, prince Khusro, as his successor. However, the idea was dropped as the court was divided on the issue. At this point of time, a powerful section of fanatical Sunni Muslims, of whom Sheikh Farid Bukhari (Murtaza Khan) was the most prominent, disgruntled with Akbar's dispensation, pledged its support to prince Salim provided he undertook to restore Islam to its former glory in the matters of the State. Sheikh Farid Bukhari was an ardent follower of Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi who considered Guru Arjun Devji a *Kafir* (infidel). According to '*Tazuk-I-Jehangiri*', Jehangir (earlier Prince Salim) had for long harboured the wish either to bring Guru Arjun Devji into the fold of Islam or to liquidate him. Therefore, he just needed an alibi to accomplish his evil designs. Such a pretext was provided by the revolt of prince Khusro which was crushed with a heavy hand, with Khusro becoming a fugitive. However, on his way to Kabul, Prince Khusro sought the blessings of Guru Arjun Devji and also requested for monetary help which was readily granted by the Guru considering the sad plight of the prince. The incident was exaggerated and reported by Prithvi Chand and Sheikh Sirhindi, the enemies of the Guru, to the Emperor who seized this opportunity to fulfil his long standing wish and also to placate his fanatical co-religionists. Guru Arjun was arrested and produced before Emperor Jehangir at Lahore on charges of creating schism in society by compiling a *Granth* (Guru Granth Sahib) and aiding and abetting the enemies of the Emperor to overthrow him.

Martyrdom: The Guru denied the allegations and clarified that the *Granth* compiled by him included only the 'Word' singing the praises of the Lord and did not belittle any religion and that the assistance given by him to Khusro was in the nature of humanitarian help extended to a person in dire straits. The Emperor, who was otherwise impressed by the demeanor and reasoning of the Guru, pronounced the judgment that the Guru should alter the hymns of the *Granth* in keeping with the prevailing dogmas of Islam and Brahmanism. According to certain sources, he also imposed a heavy fine on the Guru, non-compliance of which would result in death by torture. The Guru declined to change the hymns of Guru Granth Sahib on the grounds that they were the inspired 'Word' of the Gurus and the sages descending on them directly from the Lord and that the fine would not be paid, as he had done no wrong. Accordingly, the Guru was tortured in numerous inhuman ways and his spirit left the mortal frame when his disabled body was hurled from the fort into the river Ravi.

With his mind fixed on the Absolute, Guru Arjun Devji remained calm and composed even in the midst of such barbarities. Hazrat Mian Mir, the well-known Sufi Saint, was so shocked to see the cruelties being perpetrated that he wished to cause upheavals in Delhi and Lahore, the seats of the Mughal power, through his occult powers, but was counseled by the Guru not to do so and to accept the will of the Lord without any resentment.

Guru Arjun Devji zealously safeguarded the legacy of his predecessors and made significant contribution to it. He compiled the Granth Sahib, thereby leaving behind the authentic hymns of the earlier Gurus and the sages whose philosophy and way of life was similar to that of the Gurus. The Granth Sahib was installed in the Harmandir at Amritsar and everybody, including the Guru, paid obeisance to it. The Guru thus gave to the Sikhs the Scriptures, which they could look up to for guidance even when the Guru was not physically present.

Towns and Lakes: Following the tradition of his predecessors, Guru Arjun Devji went on long tours spreading the tenets of Sikhism and also established new cities/trade centers such as Sri Gobindpur, Taran Taran, Amritsar and Kartarpur where craftsman and artisans could work, sell their wares and prosper. Construction of *sarovars* (tanks at Santokhsar and Amritsar was completed and the digging of a tank at Taran Taaran was commenced. Harmandir Sahib was constructed in the middle of the tank in Amritsar, giving the Sikhs their most important shrine. Shelters for the lepers were constructed near the tank at Taran Taaran and a hospital was also opened to their treatment. This was a unique step taken at a time when lepers were shunned all over the world.

The Sikhs were enjoined to contribute one-tenth of their earnings for social and religious purposes and *masands* (collectors) were appointed on territorial basis to collect the offerings from the Sikhs for the Guru's treasury. Thus the Guru gave the Sikhs some measure of self-governance within the empire which was to go a long way to help them to shoulder the tasks ahead.

Landmark: Guru Arjun Devji's martyrdom is a significant landmark in the long drawn tortuous struggle to 'profess, propagate and practice one's religion', which is one of the Fundamental Rights in India today and which has been incorporated in the list of Human Rights by the United Nations. But for the heroic efforts of supermen like Guru Arjun Devji in the face of heavy odds, there would neither have been any Fundamental Rights nor any Human Rights. It is impossible to repay the debt we owe to them for having made us free men. The best homage that mankind can pay to them is to follow the path shown by them in thought, word and deed.



Bibi Deep Kaur: A Forgotten Tale of Valour

*K.S. Ahluwalia**

* D-138 Sector 36, Noida. 201 303. UP.

A contingent of Turkish soldiers is on active patrol. The area rulers have specifically assigned this contingent to keep a watch over the Sikh *jatha* that had gathered in Malwa and would surely proceed to Anandpur Sahib for participating in Sri Dasmesh's (Guru Gobind Singh) Dharam Yudh.

Additional responsibilities assigned to this contingent included instilling fear among people who either express sympathy with the Sikh *jatha* or welcome it or serve it any way. For this reason, the Turkish contingent always moved ahead of the Sikh *Jatha*. Three miles from the road leading to Anandpur Sahib in Hoshiarpur District, is a Village named Talban. Bibi Deep Kaur, the subject of our story, was resident of this village. There was only one Sikh house in this village, Bibi Deep Kaur's residence. Today her husband wasn't home. He had already left for participating in Sri Dasmesh's Dharam Yudh. When Bibi heard of *Jatha's* arrival, she was filled with emotions of sacrifice and valour. She explained her plan of action to other women in her neighborhood. But the Turkish soldiers had successfully frightened the residence of this village. Thus no one was willing to accompany her.

"Let them not proceed, if someone doesn't want to", Deep Kaur told herself. For how could one stay behind if they have even the slightest love for the Guru in their heart? Holding onto the quest of love and a glimpse of the Sikh *Jatha*, Deep kaur proceeded alone and awaited the arrival of *Sant-Sipahis*. Suddenly dust arose from afar. Her face brightened with joy. Her quest for *Jatha's* sight grew stronger. Now she started walking on the road toward the rising dust storm. Soon she realized that this was not the *Jatha* of Sant – Sipahis. Rather it was the contingent of evil Turkish soldiers. Surprised, she quickly moved off the road and tried to hide herself by sitting next to a tree. As the Turkish contingent got closer, it's commander caught sight of Deep Kaur. Seeing the youthful beauty, he lost all self-control. He commandingly asked, "Who are you?" "Whoever I am. How does it matter to you?" She answered fearlessly. Commander's attraction grew stronger with her challenge. He remarked softly. "By Shahensha's (king's) orders, I have been deputed to keep a watch on Sikhs in this area. Since the Sikh *Jatha* is heading this way, I need to ascertain whether you are a Sikh." "If I were a Sikh, then?" "Then we will have to arrest you and send you to Lahore".

Deep Kaur heard his response. But, being a Sikh how could she lie. Fearlessly, she announced, "I am Sikh." The Turk Commander was astonished by her fearlessness as captive of her beauty, by now, he was aroused beyond any self-control. He spoke softly and said, "Beautiful, I am responsible for capturing Sikhs. You are a Sikh, I should arrest you, but I cannot do that. I cannot fulfil my responsibilities. For I have a heart that worships beauty, and it is your's now. I am your captive."

Deep Kaur's face reddened with anger. She lashed out saying: "You should be ashamed of yourself talk to me like this."

What is there to be ashamed of where hearts have met? I am yours. Accept me and I shall keep you as my Begum (wife)", he said.

"I am a Sikh and if you ever uttered anything like this again I will slash your tongue," Deep Kaur responded. By now she was shaking with anger.

"What kind of a beauty it would be that doesn't exhibit enticing or alluring behavior. I am impressed by your behavior. Now don't delay anymore and let's go. What are you going to get from these wild Sikhs?"

Saying this, the commander dismounted from his horse, moved towards Deep Kaur while his contingent waited on the opposite side of the road. As he dismounted, Deep Kaur stood up. Seeing him approach her, she, challenging, said: "Beware, if you touch my body I will not spare you". Insane under arousal, the commander ignored her warning and instead proceeded to hug her. Deep Kaur pulled back with lightening speed. By now she had the small *kirpan* in her hand.

As the commander approached, she struck him in his stomach with the *kirpan*. A blood spring burst open. With painful cries, he simply dropped to the ground. By now Deshmesh's daughter had jumped into the war. As the wounded commander sat on ground, she viciously attacked him once again, sending his evil soul to burn in hell. Before, the Turkish soldiers could advance, she moved swiftly to take control of the commander's sword and was well-prepared for self-defense.

Seeing their dying commander, the soldiers advanced shaking in anger and simultaneously attacked. However, Sri Dasmesh's daughter wasn't scared, being out-numbered. Like a lioness she stood fast for the challenge. She used the sword like a man and soon two soldier fell to the ground while several others were severely wounded.

Deep Kaur too sustained deep wounds on her face and neck. Although her wounds profusely bleeding, she kept her courage and continued fighting like a man. Today, Turkish soldiers were challenged by a woman.

Far on the road, the sound of horses could be heard once again. This time the *Sant Sipahi's* Jatha was approaching. As the Turkish soldiers saw the Sikh *jatha*, they got scared, immediately mounted their horses and ran for their lives. The bodies of the commander and five of his associates were left behind, lying cold on the ground.

The sight of approaching Sikh brothers filled Deep Kaur filled with joy. She quickly to move towards the road, but couldn't. She had lost too much blood and thus was unable to walk. She simply fell unconscious to the ground. The Sikh Jatha saw an unconscious Deep Kaur and six dead bodies of Turkish soldiers, upon reaching the location.

It did not take them long to comprehend the situation. Immediately, they prepared a bed for Dasmesh's daughter, dressed her wounds and awakened her with medication. Then, carrying her along, the *Jatha* proceeded to Anandpur Sahib for participating in the Dasmesh father's *Dharam Yudh*. Fully aware of the situation, our Dasmesh-father Gobind Singh Ji was strolling outside his court, waiting the arrival of this *Jatha*. Seeing them arrive, he joyfully advanced to receive them and asked "where is my daughter?" *Jatha* members were confused. They did not understand the meaning of this question since there were many Sikh women among the *Jatha*.

Who did Guru Sahib honor with daughter's address? They could not understand. In meantime, Guru Sahib quickly moved towards the palanquin carrying the wounded Deep Kaur. Raising the *palki* curtain, he blessed and kissed her forehead, saying "This is my daughter Deep Kaur. Because of such a daughter my Panth shall ever be in *Chardi Kala*".

