

# Guru Arjun Dev's twin 'gifts' of Gurbani & Qurbani

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16 June marks the Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Devji. (1563-1606)

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NEXT TO IGNORANCE, INDIFFERENCE to moral laws is the prime cause of all human misery. Gautam Buddha (c.563-483 BC) deeply moved by life's suffering and sorrow, renounced princely comforts, and set forth to discover the True Cause, eventually laying down an "eight-fold path" to self realisation.

In ancient Greece the wisest of men, Socrates (470-399 BC) was charged with 'impiety' and corrupting the young. He was pronounced guilty and sentenced to "die by drinking hemlock".

In the times of Roman rule, Crucifixion was the normal, if brutal method of execution for those who did not possess Roman citizenship. Since the wounds inflicted on Jesus at the cross were not in themselves serious, a stronger man could take days to die. According to Mark (15:44) Pilate was surprised that Jesus at the Cross had died within hours.

## Ignorance?

History books in India only peripherally mention Guru Arjun's (1563-1606) martyrdom by an imperial decree. Summoned to Lahore in June 1606 under Jahangir's royal command, he was summarily sentenced to be tortured - '*ba-yasa*' - until death. Even the noted historian, the late W.H. Mcleod, in his "*Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*",<sup>1</sup> briefly recounts the wrath of Emperor Jahangir, diarized in *Tuzuk-e-Jahangiri*, alleging that Guru Arjun had provided sanctuary to the rebellious Prince Khusro. The Mughal king pointedly recorded in his memoirs: that too many people - 'including some foolish Muslims' - were being 'converted' by the Guru's teachings, and that - if not checked - he could pose a grave danger to the Mughal rule in India!

Arguably, it was the meticulous research of the late Sirdar Kapur Singh that uncovers the specific 'directive' of Emperor Jahangir to the Subedar of Lahore, under which the Guru of the Sikhs was to be executed by the barbaric Changezi - penalty, ***ba-yasa, whereby no blood must be shed in order to cause death by slow torture***: by boiling the Guru in water, alternately pouring red-hot sand on bare skin, and on the third day, immersing him in the river Ravi that flowed past the city of Lahore. Tradition has it that Guru Arjun's body was never recovered from the Ravi, and the spot - now called Dehra Sahib - subsequently alluviated not far from the Lahore Fort and the Samadhi of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century monarch Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

**Beyond doubt, the martyrdom of Guru Arjun, was intended to strike terror in the hearts of Indians, in general, and the growing community of Sikhs in particular. The extreme act of brutality sent shock waves across north India and galvanized the masses, who congregated at Amritsar to show loyalty to - and solidarity with - the successor Guru Hargobind, who had been installed as the Sixth Guru.** In a significant departure from tradition, the youthful Guru Hargobind wore two swords - one representing

*Piri*, for shielding the religious congregation, and the second representing *Miri*, i.e. symbol of sovereignty of the people. **Together, the two swords came to symbolize the emancipatory principle implicit in Guru Nanak's exhortation:** ਜਦੋਂ ਤਉ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਖੇਲਣ ਕਾ ਚਾਉ ॥  
ਸਿਰੁ ਧਰਿ ਤਲੀ ਗਲੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਆਉ ॥

### **Crisis of Character:**

At the philosophical plane, it is apparent that Guru Arjun not only knew of the grave challenge that he faced but also of the moral imperatives of the imperial wrath he obviously incurred by preaching the Word of God to a people steeped in superstition and deeply divided by the age-old caste system. Indeed Sikhism's founding Prophet, Guru Nanak had emphasized the fundamental truth of One Creator permeating the universe. He preached equality, charity and love of God, devoting his life and extensive travels to establish a dialogue with monarchs as well as monks and maulavis. **His purpose was to put an end to religious conflict and establish a just social and moral order, as the starting point of the evolution of human spirit.**

Two consequences flowed from the great sacrifice – *shahadat* – of Guru Arjun Dev. **First**, the moral fabric of the Mughal rule in India was in tatters. Queen Nur Jahan, a disciple of Hazrat Mian Mir, was much distressed and became estranged. She apparently died of a broken heart. Her despair is reflected in her own Farsi couplet inscribed on her tomb in Shahdara (near Lahore): "*Bar mazar-e-maa ghariban / neh chirag-o-neh guley / Neh par-e-parwana sozad – neh sada-e-bul-bule.*" The monument (in sharp contrast to Taj Mahal) is a forlorn place in Pakistan.

**Second**, the decline of the Mughal Dynasty crept into the vitals of the kingdom, later manifest in the grim and bloody battles for succession fought by Aurangzeb. The irreversible process made the kings, like Farrukh Siyyar, even more brutal.

### **Guru's Gospel:**

As if by Divine dispensation Guru Arjun had, in 1604, completed the compilation of Pothi Sahib – Adi Granth – by assembling and arranging – Raga wise – the *Bani* of Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das and his own voluminous and inspired hymns, together with *Bani* of several Bhaktas, Saints and Bhatt scholars. The Adi Granth was formally installed in September 1604 at Holy Harimandir.

### **Universality:**

The Guru Granth's message has a timeless quality and universal appeal. As the repository of the Sikh ideology, Guru Granth explains the basic relationship between human consciousness and social imperatives. **Guru Nanak perceived the world a Dharamsal – the arena of duty, and an opportunity for social and moral activism, which eventually sublimated in the Khalsa ideal, the saint-warrior in the service of God.** The Sikh activism lays great store by the dignity of labour and the need for sharing. Indeed the 1430 pages of the holy Scripture encompass the eternal quest for such an ideal society. Its hymns of rare beauty and lyricism constantly return to the theme of inner light, love and life of altruism, and participation.

### **Doctrinal Purity:**

In Guru Nanak's scheme there is no room for ritual or hypocrisy that masquerades as religion. The period of Ten Gurus – AD 1469 to AD 1708 – can be best characterized - in the words of Kabirji - as *Gyan ki andhi*. To use the terminology of Western thought, one

could say – Guru Nanak blazed the Age of Reason, illumining the Mind’s dark recesses with the floodlight of the great moral truths, expressed in ineffable lyrical poetry – of utter beauty and cadence. The Sikh principles poured out in cascades of inspired verse, filling the spiritual void across much of the Asian continent, Such as:

ਆਧੀ ਪਾਛੇ ਜੋ ਜਲੁ ਬਰਖੈ ਤਿਹਿ ਤੇਰਾ ਜਨੁ ਭੀਨਾ ॥  
ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਬੁੰਦ ਸੁਹਾਨੀ ਗੀਅਰੈ ਗੁਰਿ ਮੋਹੀ ਮਨੁ ਹਰਿ ਰਸਿ ਲੀਨਾ ॥

### The Trinity of Principles:

*Seva, sharing and Daswand* at the moral plane, and *Naam Japna* – Adoration of God – became the fore runners of the Khalsa concept. This Trinity, over the five centuries and more, has cemented the Sikh ethos, and helped Sikh centres, we know as the GURDWARA, across the world. One hopes that these concepts will continue to ensure collective cohesion and the spirit of charity.

Gurbani redefines the bench marks of character building: ਮਿਠਤੁ ਨੀਵੀ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਗੁਣ ਚੰਗਿਆਈਆ ਤਤੁ ॥ OR ਫਰੀਦਾ ਬੁਰੇ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ ਕਰਿ ਗੁਸਾ ਮਨਿ ਨ ਹਵਾਇ ॥ OR, consider the definition of *Heroism* – in moral terms: ਨਾਨਕ ਸੋ ਸੂਰਾ ਵਰੀਆਮੁ ਜਿਨਿ ਵਿਚਹੁ ਦੁਸਟੁ ਅਹੰਕਰਣੁ ਮਾਰਿਆ . OR, The Tenth Master’s Dictum: ਧਨ ਜੀਓ ਤਿਹ ਕੋ ਜਗ ਮਹਿ ਮੁਖ ਤੇ ਹਰਿ ਚਿਤ ਮਹਿ ਜੁਧ ਬੀਚਾਰੇ ॥

**I have never ceased to wonder how well focused is the philosophy of Guru Granth in regard to every aspect of human existence and human endeavour. It is in this context that one is struck by Gurbani’s emphasis on scientific temperament – giving the pride of place to Reason, Logic and Psychoanalysis. This aspect offers good ground for exploration. For example, Guru Nanak gave us a vision of the Mysterious Universe - and its inherent symphony and cosmology - a hundred years before Galileo (1564-1642) – when Copernicus was a student at Cracow – his “Revolution of the Celestial Orbs” yet unwritten! The famous ਕੀਤਾ ਪਸਾਉ ਏਕੋ ਕਵਾਉ ॥ and ਗਗਨ ਮੈ ਥਾਲੁ ਰਵਿ ਚੰਦੁ ਦੀਪਕ ਬਨੇ ਤਾਰਿਕਾ ਮੰਡਲ ਜਨਕ ਮੋਤੀ ॥ evoke reverence and awe. It is significant that both Copernicus and Galileo had been *indicted* for ‘undermining’ the authority of the Christian Church, though neither of them had specifically intended to challenge the Papal power.**

Guru Nanak, on the other hand, sought out religious and political leaders – Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jain and Gorakh-Panthi – even animist aborigines – in far off places, and engaged them in earnest discourse on every aspect of human endeavour. **History has hardly witnessed a more prophetic and *peripatetic* teacher. Discourse became the Guru’s principal instrument to counter ignorance, superstition and every form of social and political injustice.** No wonder the Gurus are hailed as Messiahs of the Downtrodden, in the true sense of the word.

Guru Nanak’s “Odyssy” was carried on by the Fifth, Sixth, Ninth and Tenth Gurus who journeyed across subcontinental India. **Their mission shook the people’s old beliefs to their roots, even as it shocked the established *Brahminist* regime of the Hindu Society and irked the ruling Muslim dynasts.** Their campaign culminated in the establishment of Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. Every Sikh acquired the right of initiation with Amrit – to be Reborn, in the moral and spiritual sense.

### Social Revolution:

The Gurus set in motion systems of a mass - based practical way of life. Guru Nanak's refining of the Gurmukhi Script and use of people's language – studded with felicitous folksy idiom – for explaining intricate philosophical concepts and basic truths transformed religious thought, even as it antagonized the privileged class. Social *activism* combined with personal *optimism* became the keynote of this movement. As a matter of fact both these qualities (ਸੰਗਤ ਤੇ ਚੜ੍ਹਦੀ ਕਲਾ) constitute the where-withal of the Sikh Dynamics.

After the martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev and the installation of Guru Granth Sahib, India was never the same. Passivity was uprooted; Discrimination was under assault; a sense of freedom and human dignity developed apace. Within a few hundred years, the yoke of foreign rule lifted in India – the glow of freedom dawned – but not before untold suffering and unparalleled sacrifices of the Sikhs.

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