

# Charhdi-Kala - The Ascendant Spirit

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THE CONCEPT OF RISING SPIRIT (Charhdi Kala) is unique and exclusive to the Sikh religion only. It drives its basic dynamic power from the teachings of Guru Nanak. "*Jae to prem khelon ka chao, sir dhar tali gali meri aao, it marg per dhrija sir dia kaan naa kijae*" (SGGS: 1412). The entire life of Guru Gobind Singh is a glorious example of "Charhdi-Kala". At the martyrdom of his four sons, he said, "*Char muya to kiya hua, jeevat kaiy hazaar*". Guru Arjun Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed their lives in order to protect the independence and freedom of all religions. The spirit of "Charhdi-Kala" dispels fear of death and on the contrary it instils confidence, courage and fearlessness to fight against tyranny, oppression and injustice of any kind. "*Sura so paichaniyae jo lare deen ke het, purja purja kat marey kabhu naa chhade khet*" (SGGS: 1105).

## Compassion:

Sikhs have always been proud of their religion, heritage and culture. Their faith in spiritual ascendancy of mankind, as a whole, is the basis of tolerance of all other religions of the world in contrast to a sectarian philosophy professed by some. Mainly it is for this reason that Sikhism has been considered as one of the higher religions of the world faith. It is essential for any higher religion to convey a message of peace, compassion, respect and tolerance of other faiths with a universal appeal of brotherhood. This message has to be addressed to the entire mankind without any distinction. Guru Nanak in one of his sermons spoke, "*Ek pita ekas ke hum barik tu mera gur hae*" (SGGS: 611). Subsequently, Guru Gobind Singh appealed to the whole humanity, "*Manas ki jaat sabhe eke pehchanbo*". Thus the spiritual fight of the "Charhdi-Kala" in Sikhism has been continuously in ascendance in order to meet the Divine.

The Sikh religion was founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539) on the basis of one God philosophy. He preached that God is omnipresent, omnipotent, self luminescent, indestructible and all truth. He is the sole creator and sustainer of the entire universe. Guru Nanak vividly kept in view the spirit of 'Charhdi-Kala' when he opposed superstition, idol worship, rituals, renunciation and dishonesty. He also disseminated humility, compassion, selfless service and equality for all. He raised the status of women equal to the man in all spheres. "*So kiyon manda akhiye jit jammeh rajaan.*" (SGGS: 473) Guru Nanak established a casteless, egalitarian society, rooted in the practice of community participation, including Guru-Ka-Langar where people from all faiths would sit in 'Pangat' and eat together.

Guru Nanak exhorted that 'Nam-Simran' is the only way which enjoins man with man and God; and according to him a man is judged by his deeds and not by the faith he belongs to. "*Sacho ure sabh ko uppar sach achar*" (SGGS: 62). "Truth is higher but higher still is truthful living." Guru Amar Das (1479-1554) upheld the values of 'Charhdi-Kala' when he brought in revolutionary changes in the then society by emancipating women from the social evil of 'Sati', "Purdah" while pleading a case for widow marriage.

Maintaining the spiritual ascendancy, Guru Arjun Dev (1563-1606) got the Golden Temple built at Amritsar which is the highest seat of Sikh religion. Its foundation was laid by a Muslim saint - Mian Mir. This clearly denotes that the spirit of secularism, tolerance and

respect of other faiths was well established in Sikhism. “*Sabh ko meet hum apaan keena, hum sabhnaa ke saajan*”. (SGGS: 671). The ‘Adi Granth’ was compiled by Guru Arjun Dev. It contains spiritual hymns of five Sikh Gurus, his own and of several saints and bhagats who belonged to different faiths. The liberal and secular approach of Guru Arjun Dev angered Jehangir who got him executed at Lahore after subjecting him to severe physical torture. With the Grace of Almighty and ‘Charhdi-Kala’, Guru Arjun Dev continued to recite, “*Tera keeya meetha lage, har nam padarth Nanak mange,*” (SGGS: 394). In the same spirit Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675) sacrificed his life at Delhi (by the order of Aurangzeb) in order to protect the right of Hindus to exist as a separate religion. “*Bhae kahoon ko det naih, naih bhae manat ann*” (SGGS: 1427). The supreme martyrdoms of Guru Arjun Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur shook the foundation of the Mughal Empire in India.

### **Quantum Leap:**

The spirit of ‘Charhdi-Kala’ took a quantum leap during the Guruship of Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708). He was ordained as the Tenth Guru of the Sikhs. He was a spiritualist and saint cum general of the highest order. His scriptures infused confidence, courage and valour into the minds of the oppressed humanity to fight for justice and truth. In the year 1699, Guru Gobind Singh established the order of Khalsa by administering ‘Amrit’ to Panj Payaras’ (of different faiths) and, in turn, got it administered to his own self from them. This act laid the foundation of democracy in the history of India for the first time. Guru Gobind Singh fought against the Moghul tyranny and injustice by proclaiming that when all other methods of persuasion and advice fail to bring sanity and order, it is righteous to take to the sword. During the course of a prolonged fight against the Moghuls, his entire family and his several beloved Sikhs laid their valuable lives so that the values of righteousness live for all times to come.

### **The Winning Mode:**

Finally, the Tenth Guru abolished the succession of the Living Master and ordained Guruship to the ‘Holy Guru Granth Sahib’. Right from that time the ‘Holy Guru Granth Sahib’ - has been dedicated to the welfare of the whole humanity. Its spiritual hymns amalgamate the diversity of the entire world into a singular unity of the Eternal Divine.

The Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh knows victory and no defeat because he is also a product of the (Charhdi-Kala) - spiritual ascendancy, courage and celestial bliss. Let the ‘Charhdi-Kala’ continue to dominate and illuminate our hearts and we on our own part try to put in our best to live upto its expectations.

It is a well known fact that at the end of the daily Sikh prayer, the whole ‘Sangat’ sings in one voice:

“*Nanak Nam Charhdi-Kala, Tere Bhane Sarbat Da Bhalla*”.

