

Guru Tegh Bahadur and Kashmir

Jagmohan*

* MP and former Governor of Jammu and Kashmir.

On November 11, 1675, Guru Tegh Bahadur suffered martyrdom. This martyrdom was deeply connected with developments in Kashmir. There was hardly any other event which caused as great a revolutionary impact on the Sikh faith. The great fighting force, the Khalsa, which Guru Gobind Singh created and which lives and prospers as a brave and dynamic community, was a direct fallout of the barbarous and brutal torture to which a saintly soul like Guru Tegh Bahadur was subjected merely because he defended the right of Kashmiri Pandits to live in peace in accordance with the tenets of their religion.

Influenced by the narrow and fanatic outlook of Aurangzeb, the Mughal Governor Iftikhar Khan (1671-1675) started the persecution of Kashmiri Pandits with the objective of securing their conversion to Islam. Agonised by Iftikhar Khan's relentless campaign, a group of Pandits led by Kirpa Ram Dutt of Mattan, went to the Holy Cave of Amarnath to pray before Lord Shiva and seek His blessings in their hour of distress.

At the cave, the leader of the group dreamt that the Immortal Lord (Amar Nath) instructed them to seek guidance from Guru Tegh Bahadur. Accordingly, a deputation of Kashmiri Pandits went to Chak Nanki/Anandpur Sahib to meet Guru Tegh Bahadur.

The petition presented to the Guru on May 25, 1675, said: "We suffer great atrocities, sacred threads (*Janeus*) are forcibly taken of our persons. Cows are killed. *Janeus*, a maund and a quarter in weight, are snapped in a single day.

Saddened by the plight of the Pandits, Guru Tegh Bahadur became pensive. At the moment, Gobind, the Guru's son entered the room. "Why are you, dear father, in such deep thought?" enquired the nine-year old lad.

"The present-day sad state of affairs the state of Kaliyug would abate only if a pure and pious soul comes forward for supreme sacrifice," reflected the Guru.

"Who can be more pure and pious than you?" queried Gobind. This comment convinced Guru Tegh Bahadur that the young boy was fit to assume the responsibility of Guruship. He made up his mind to put his life at stake. He advised the Pandits to go and tell the Mughal Governor and his Emperor that Tegh Bahadur was their Guru and if he could convert their Guru to Islam, they would all accept conversion.

The Guru's stand so infuriated the Mughal establishment that Aurangzeb ordered his arrest and subsequently, his execution on November 11, 1675. The Guru died calmly. But a volcanic upsurge erupted in the hearts of men and women and history underwent a revolutionary change. The great Khalsa emerged on the scene and sparrows turned into hawks. Thus, the tiny spark that later on turned into a great fire and warmed numerous souls, had its origin in Kashmir.

About Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom, Guru Gobind Singh gave expression to his sentiment in these simple, yet telling words:

“He sacrificed his life
For protecting the rights of Hindus
To wear sacred thread and caste symbols,
He made the supreme sacrifice in this dark age

He gave his head, but did not utter a word in pain
He suffered martyrdom for the sake of *dharmā*
He did this great heroic deed
He readily gave up his head
But did not give up his conviction
He avoided performing miracles,
A cheap act of fooling people.
For such acts are ungodly.

Later on, in a strain similar to Lord Krishna's declaration in Bhagvad Gita, Guru Gobind Singh said: **For this purpose was I born: to uphold righteous, to protect those worthy and virtuous: to overcome and destroy the evil doers**". Guru Gobind Singh, in fact, became the very embodiment of Shakti, the divine power, and aroused in his followers a new sense of courage and fortitude. In the connection, it has been rightly noted that "Shakti blended easily with the Jat cultural patterns which had been brought from the plains. The result was a new and powerful synthesis which prepared the Panth and the community for a determinative role in the chaotic circumstances of the eighteenth century.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's response to the Kashmiri Pandits not only produced a revolutionary impact on the Sikh religion and outlook but also strengthened the social and cultural forces which facilitated national integration. And Kashmiri Pandits to date feel one with the Sikhs.

On April 16, 1995, about 1,200 of them from different parts of the country and abroad went to Gurdwaras Sis Ganj and Anandpur Sahib and installed a *shilalekh* which, when translated reads: **O thee, the fountainhead of India's civilisation, we pay our obeisance to you... You created history by your epoch-making martyrdom. Once again, we are facing extinction. The forces of fundamentalism, drawing sustenance from timid politics of the Indian state, have forced us out of our homeland. O Divinity Incarnate, awaken the Spirit of the Nation.** Later on Kirpa Ram Dutt became a follower of the Sikh Faith and died fighting the Mughal army in the Battle of Cham Kaur (1705).

