

Pir Buddha Shah in the Life & Times of Guru Gobind Singh Ji

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Pir Buddha Shah, whose real name was Sayyed Badruddin, was the scion of a respected Muslim family of Sahdora, District Ambala. Modern researchers have been able to trace his pedigree with the help of some members of his progeny now settled in Akalgarh, in Gujranwala district of Pakistan, where they have migrated. There is a general belief that the forefathers of Pir Buddha Shah had shifted from Samana, District Patiala, to Sahdora and their conglomeration came to be known as Mohalla Sayyeddan, which later changed to Mohalla Samania. The Sahdora town, approximately 340 years old was Sadhurah in its earlier incarnation, which gradually got corrupted into 'Sahdora'. This was an abode of many a holy and saintly figure for a long time.

Sayyed Badruddin, later known as Pir Buddha Shah was born in 1647 AD in this ancient town. His family was recipient of a land endowment made by the Mughal monarchs and they enjoyed deep reverence and respect of the populace. Tradition has it that Emperor Aurangzeb had a lot of esteem for this pious family. In spite of the splendour and abundance surrounding his kin, Badruddin was not inclined to the worldly wealth, which gave him the synonym for 'inane' i.e. 'Buddhu'. This, however, did not detract this noble soul. but as he was a member of the Sayyed family, he began to be known as 'Buddhu Shah'. As he continued to tread the path of piety and altruism, the number of his friends, followers and devotees went on increasing. A person considered disinclined to and inept in worldly affairs, started finding a place in the hearts of the masses as a religious leader or Pir.

Pir Buddha Shah dedicated himself to the service of the people, whose welfare he held uppermost in his mind. In return they bestowed their love and devotion on him and thus his fame spread far and wide. Rather than studying religious books, he set out in quest of holy men, whose company he relished. He reached the door of a renowned religious teacher, Bhikam Shah, who resided in District Karnal. Bhikam Shah had once bowed towards the East, and when questioned by his followers, he had told them that he had seen a new sun rising with the advent of Guru Gobind Singh. He had travelled to Patna, where the child had been born, to behold the halo around the head of the holy beings. Bhikam Shah also familiarised Buddha Shah with the philosophy of Guru Nanak, the universal teacher and founder of the Sikh faith. This kindled a keen desire in the mind of Buddha Shah to meet Guru Gobind Singh. At their first meeting at Lakhnour, Buddha Shah was highly impressed with the qualities of the guru and he joined the ranks of numerous devotees of that Divine personality. As Guru Gobind Singh reached Paonta, Buddha Shah in company of a number of his devotees also went there to be with him.

At the age of 18, Buddha Shah tied his nuptial knot with the sister of Sayyed Khan, who was an officer in Aurangzeb's army. Naseeran, his wife was a comely and pious girl, who soon moulded herself to the saintly ways of her noble husband. She persuaded her brother not to entertain hostile postures towards Guru Gobind Singh. She and Badruddin passed their days in complete harmony and marital bliss and were blessed with four sons, who were named Sayyed Sharaf, Sayyed Mohammad Shah, Sayyed Mohammad Baksh and Sayyed Shah Hussain. Three of these worthy sons of Buddha Shah sacrificed their lives for Guru Gobind Singh. Two fell fighting on his side in the battle of Bhangani and one shed blood while protecting him. On one of his visits Buddha Shah and Naseeran, the latter's brother Sayyed Khan urged them to send one of their sons to him so that he could get him

a suitable appointment in the royal court. But with all earnestness and solicitude, Badruddin declined this offer saying that he had been showered with all blessings of the almighty and he did not need any favour. In fact he wanted his children to give their best in such a court where truth and justice prevailed and everybody was treated with the same consideration and kindness. He was steadfast in his resolve not to accept any royal patronage, which discouraged his brother-in-law from insisting on his proposal and the matter was closed.

Badruddin undertook deep study of the Holy Quran and other religious books. He kept company with holy people and refrained from indulging in mundane activities. He was a pious Muslim and humility, broadmindedness and generosity were his intrinsic attributes. He found much in common between Islam and Sikhism. Monotheism and the spirit of human equality in both the faiths appealed to him greatly. Came to be known as Pir Buddha Shan, he rejoiced in the knowledge that the Sikh faith and Islam had much in common on these counts. He also started realizing that by following Guru Gobind Singh's teachings, he could find salvation. It was a happy coincidence that after the martyrdom of his revered father, the Tenth Guru had made the area of Sadhaura his field of action. As the Guru's mission was to widely spread the teachings of Guru Nanak, Pir Buddha Shah found it highly compelling to benefit from this noble process.

On the appeal of Raja Medni Parkash (also known as Sat Parkash) of Nahan, Guru Gobind Singh went to the Paonta town on the banks of the Yamuna river. As the crow flies, the Paonta fort was hardly 15 miles from Sadhaura. Pir Buddha Shah developed a keen desire to meet Guru Gobind Singh on that salubrious spot and find an ample opportunity to have long spiritual discussions with him. According to the redoubtable poet, Bhai Santokh Singh, when Pir Buddha Shah found himself face to face with the resplendent personality of the Guru, he asked him to suggest a way of quenching his spiritual thirst. How can one have communion with the Almighty, he asked. The Guru told him that wrapped in ignorance and narrow-mindedness, human beings embroil themselves in worldly matters and start considering their families, wealth, property and other belongings their ultimate goal. This self-centredness becomes an obstacle between a human being and the Supreme Lord. As we go on falling deeper in the pit of greed and self-indulgence, we move farther from our sacred goal. This discourse left an indelible impression on Pir Buddha Shah's mind and, according to Macaulif, he stayed on with the Guru for some time with his heart filled with utmost respect and affection for him. He confessed that his soul would always enjoy the fragrance of the divine personality of Guru Gobind Singh and that the latter could count him as one of his humble and true admirers.

This became possible because both the noble souls were free of parochial thinking on religion and believed in universal brotherhood. **The Guru told Pir Buddha Shah that ego and vanity were the real impediments in a man's way to reach the Almighty, because conceit and vainglory gave rise to avarice and misdeeds leading man to sin. But when the light of divine love appears, the mist of arrogance and ostentation scatters away.** This can be achieved by tearing the veil of falsehood, selfishness and self-glorification. Both the Guru and Pir Buddha Shah were much above fanaticism and narrow considerations of caste and creed. Both were adherents to the fundamental principles of true religion.

The Pir was highly impressed with the great Guru's catholicity of views and his disarming love for the whole humanity. Without deviating from the faith of his forefathers, the Pir became a devotee of the Guru because of his spiritual loftiness and dazzling personality. The Pir told the Guru that inspite of his best efforts to achieve control over his senses, he had remained unsuccessful. He was unable to restrain the unbridled horses of

his worldly desires. The Guru told him not to torture himself with austerities. God was omnipresent and dwelt in the heart of all His creatures. We on the other hand were self-centred, steeped in ignorance and negligence and remained incarcerated behind the walls of pretensions, banalities and impurities. When we immerse ourselves in the Divine Being, we could feel ourselves surrounded by His illimitable light. When asked by the Sayyed how we could get past the veil of vanity and conceit, the Guru told him that it was possible only if we took refuge with our spiritual teacher, who should possess a noble soul, a pure heart and a universal compassion, who should mirror the serenity and grace of the supreme Lord and be cast in His image.

The Pir opened his heart to the Guru saying that he considered himself to be a sinner and he would find it difficult to acquit himself on the day of the eternity. Therefore he wanted the grace of the Guru to enable himself to answer for his sins on that fateful day. The Guru assured him that all his sins, deficiencies, indiscretions and wrong doings, conscious or unconscious, would be forgiven by the Lord. Guru Nanak himself would intercede on his behalf in the Divine court. This is an evidence that Guru Gobind Singh had no aversion to Islam. He had respect for every religion. Even though he fought battles with the Mughal kingdom, he crossed swords with the Hindu Pahari chieftains to oppose injustice and cruelty against the oppressed people. He was an apostle of human fraternity and love and could not tolerate the excesses of the mighty and powerful against the vulnerable and the hapless masses.

Pir Buddhu Shah found in the Guru a spiritual guide and a military hero, who would brook no aggression, however mighty the adversary might be. The acceptance by the Pir of the highest qualities of generosity, equity, love and justice as also the spiritual perfection in Guru Gobind Singh gave immense satisfaction to the Pir, who ever dedicated himself to the Guru's cause. The Pir's persona as a pious Muslim achieved after protracted study of the Islamic values and traditions was refurbished by the aura of Guru Gobind Singh's dedication to spiritual pursuits and his determination to combat injustices and avarices of the selfish rulers. The magnetic personality of the Guru cast its strong spell on the being of the noble Pir.

When questioned by one of his followers about the propriety of an accomplished Muslim offering his devotion to a non-Muslim spiritual leader, Pir Buddhu Shah advised him to cleanse his mind of such misguided impressions, because of the unity of the Creator of the universe who has no peer. The persona of Guru Gobind Singh was resplendent with the light of God Himself and he reflected all that was pious, true, pure and divine. After some time the Pir returned to Sadhaura from Paonta, but an unbreakable and eternal bond had been established between the two.

A little while after the return of Pir Buddhu Shah to Sadhaura, about five hundred Pathans relieved from service by the Emperor Aurangzeb came to him. They explained their plight of woe and dismay for having been dismissed from employment by the monarch without any fault of theirs, they beseeched him to find them employment only in one avocation they knew well and that was the one of soldiering. Sympathizing with them the Pir took them to Paonta Sahib pleading to Guru Gobind Singh to take them under his wings. The Guru happily accepted the overture of the Pir and employed all those Pathans in his troops with adequate recompense. Their commanders were named Bhikham Khan, Najat Khan and Umar Khan, who were struck with the magnanimity and puissance of the Guru.

Guru Gobind Singh's headquarter was among the Shivalik hills, where he built three forts viz. Paonta Sahib, Anandpur Sahib and Chamkaur Sahib. He tried to enlist the support of the Hindu Rajas against the aggressive and brutal attacks of the Mughal forces. But

being skeptical about the objectives of the Guru, they tried to put roadblocks against all his efforts. According to Professor Indu Bhushan Banerji, Bhim Chand, the Raja of Kahlur started looking at Guru Gobind Singh as his major adversary. He alongwith some other hill chieftains conspired to attack Paonta Sahib.

At this juncture the five hundred Pathan soldiers, who had been put in employment of Guru Gobind Singh by Pir Buddhu Shah, became treacherous and their commanders presented themselves before the Guru to beg for leave to go home for participating in various ceremonies relating to births, wedding and deaths; otherwise they ran the risk of being ostracised by their kinsmen. The Guru reminded them of their duty towards their master and to the noble profession of a soldier. But since actually the loyalty of these Pathans had been subverted by the Hindu Rajas and their services had been bought over with promises of much higher wages, they refused to change their mind and insisted on being relieved. The hill chieftains had offered many attractive rewards to the mercenary Pathans, determined as they were to minimize the manpower at the disposal of the Guru. Many of these mercurial soldiers changed sides and joined the troops of Raja Fateh Shah. Only a hundred Pathans under the command of Kale Khan stood steadfast with the Guru.

At this juncture, Guru Gobind Singh wrote to Pir Buddhu Shah telling him of the betrayal of the Pathans, who had been put in his employment at the behest of the Pir, and who had now shifted their loyalties to the Rajas because of their insatiable greed. This caused deep grief to Pir Buddhu Shah and he decided, as if to wash away the ignominy of the treason of the Pathan soldiers, to join ranks with the Guru's forces alongwith his relatives and followers. As he reached the Guru with his troops, the Guru expressed his satisfaction and happiness at his fidelity. In the battle of Bhangani, Pir Buddhu Shah and his companions fought with courage and bravery. They dispatched many a foe with their swords with lightning speed and swept the enemy like in a storm. Though ill-equipped and untrained in warfare, the Pir's young sons set an example of their swordsmanship with perseverance and unbounded fervour and they forced the enemy to flee like tattered remnants of a defeated, rag-tag and demoralised mercenary band. Pir Buddhu Shah sacrificed his two sons, a nephew and a number of comrades in this battle. According to Dr. Gokul Chand Narang, with the help of Pir Buddhu Shah, Guru Gobind Singh attained a crowing victory over the hill rajas at Bhangani. The Guru told Buddha Shah that he was a real Pir responding to which the latter said that he did not have the least sorrow over the supreme sacrifice made by his kin and he was feeling rather exalted that they laid their lives for the sake of the guru, who was a noble soul. He was happy in a way that the ignominy of the treachery of the Pathan soldiers had been partially washed away. In fact when he had reached Bhangani, the Guru was already in the thick of the battle and without a moment's dithering, he alongwith his seven hundred troops had launched a fierce attack against the adversary and had stood like a rock against the enemy's onslaughts.

The battle of Bhangani had a significance of his own. This was the first open strife between the Guru and the hill chieftains who had a very large force to command. This victory strengthened self-confidence among the Guru's followers, who was just twenty. The hill chieftains fell in disarray and lost some of their bravado and overweening self-confidence. The Guru desired to bestow some befitting rewards on the Pir, but the latter accepted with gratitude a *dastar* (turban), a wooden comb (with a few sacred hair of the Guru) and a small sword as souvenirs of the Bhangani battle. After receiving these from the Guru, Pir Buddhu Shah left for Sadhaura.

Analysing the causes of their defeat, the Pahari chieftains reached the conclusion that the reinforcement provided by the Pir, helped Guru Gobind Singh to a great extent. They

unanimously drafted a complaint addressed to the Mughal emperor in which they said that the son of Guru Tegh Bahadur, who is posing a grave danger to the Mughal reign had organised a seditionist force, to crush which we waged a fierce battle against him, but Pir Buddhu Shah, a Muslim, went to the Guru's aid alongwith his followers and kinsmen. As such he is deserving of an exemplary punishment so that others are discouraged from undesirable activities of subverting the royal government in Delhi. This communication fell in the hands of Sayyed Khan, who was a real brother of Naseeran, the wife of Pir Buddhu Shah and he helped in resolving the matter without any damage to the Pir. As for himself, the latter immersed in prayers to God and used to tell Naseeran that their sons, who had sacrificed their lives in the service of the Guru, would be granted a place in paradise by the Allah, as they had died for the sake of righteousness represented by the Great Creator Himself. The Pir was totally devoted to the philosophy of the Guru never to tolerate injustice and cruelty, greed and selfishness inflicted by the aggressor on the peace-loving, innocent and guileless people.

The tradition has it that Aurangzeb deputed his general Usman Khan to apprehend Guru Gobind Singh, the General went to Sahdaura, where the Guru was sojourning at the time and asked Pir Buddhu Shah to surrender the Guru to him alive or to deliver his dead body. Mohammad Baksh, the son of the Pir promised to hand over the blood of Guru Gobind Singh to Usman Khan the next morning, but instead of harming the Guru, he cut his own throat and arranged for a bottle of his blood to be delivered to the Mughal emissary. Usman Khan was very happy at this achievement, but, later, it was determined that it was not the Guru's blood. Horrified at the turn of events, Aurangzeb ordered Usman Khan to have suitable retribution against Pir Buddhu Shah. Before Usman Khan's arrival at Sadhaura, in consultation with Naseeran, he sent away the families of his two sons to Raja Medni Parkash of Nahan, who was also a great devotee of Guru Gobind Singh and that area full of thick jungles was also a safe haven. The Pir was apprehended by Usman Khan, who took him away to an unknown place and killed him in a savage manner. It is said that his body was cut limb by limb, thus freeing his soul from this mortal coil on March 21, 1784. As per another tradition, the Pir was burnt alive by Usman Khan. His residence at Sadhaura was razed and it was planned to kill all his surviving relatives and friends which forced them to return to the place of their forefathers, Samana.

According to historians, Pir Buddhu Shah remained steadfast in his loyalty and devotion to Guru Gobind Singh up to his breath and never wavered even for a moment in his dedication. He fought against the Rajas and defied the Mughal Empire in defence of the Guru, which is a monument to nobility and fidelity to a great cause. He was really a pious man, who did not consider any sacrifice too big in the service of a great soul – Guru Gobind Singh, the main aim of whose life was to protect those who believed in God Almighty and to destroy the evil-doers.

