

# Guru Gobind Singh – the Final Phase

Dr. Satish K. Kapoor\*

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\* Principal, Lyallpur Khalsa College, Jalandhar. 142001. Email: [satishkapoor@gmail.com](mailto:satishkapoor@gmail.com)

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Guru Gobind Singh was a Promethean hero-prophet who resuscitated the dormant spirit of Indian society: (a) by championing the cause of the helpless and the downtrodden, launching a relentless crusade against the tyranny of the ruling classes, and (b) by creating the Khalsa – the fraternity of saint-soldiers having a collective being, a collective will and a collective vision. A rare combination of saint, soldier, poet, writer, scholar and social reformer, Guru Gobind Singh exhibited - in his brief life-span of two-score and two - such heroic traits as emanate from the ineffable divine souls who descend on the earth planet with a teleo or purpose. He drew people to him from all the segments of society, irrespective of caste and creed, and instilled into them the supreme virtues of service, sacrifice and spiritual self reliance. **His charismatic persona turned the timid into chivalrous human beings – the ‘sparrows’ became ready to overawe the imperial ‘falcons’.**

**There was serenity in his sternness, a streak of spirituality in his valour and a deep strain of mysticism in his wordly deeds.** His battles against the hill chiefs and the Mughals provide just one facet of a total construct which include his fight against hypocrisy, narrow sectarianism, superstition and caste distinctions. He never fought any battle for self aggrandizement but for combating oppression.

There is no parallel to the sacrifices made by the Tenth Sikh Master. He showed resilience, maturity and equanimity when he persuaded his father to lay down his life in the cause of truth and justice, when he received the ire of hill chiefs and the Mughals after his pontificate and the creation of the Khalsa, when he had to evacuate Anandpur, ‘the city of bliss’ in the Shivaliks, bear separation from the members of his family and watch his rare collection of manuscripts and inspired writings submerge in the overflowing sarsa-stream while crossing it. He did not grieve when his two elder sons, Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh died fighting in the battle of Chamkaur, and his two younger sons, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh were bricked alive at Sirhind by Wazir Khan, the Mughal Subahdar (governor) followed by the death of his mother, Mata Gujari, in a state of shock. **He displayed fortitude when he had to take shelter in the forest of Machhiwara, with only a few of his confidants, and was hotly pursued by royal troops and their spies.** Undeterred, he managed to reach village Kangar near Dina (Faridkot district) and wrote the historic **Zafarnamah**, or “the Epistle of Victory”, to Aurangzeb who was in the Deccan, and sent it through his representatives, Bhai Daya Singh and Bhai Dharam Singh.

The **Zafarnamah** shows Guru Gobind Singh in high spirits despite military setbacks, loss of kith and kin and banishment from his territory. **It is a severe indictment of Aurangzeb’s ruthless state-policy, blatant egoism, impure intentions and irresponsible acts.** It provides justification for the use of force if all other possible remedies fail to resolve matters (verse 22). He holds him, his envoys and commanders guilty of perjury for not providing him safe passage from Anandpur despite promises and pledges ratified with oaths taken on the Quran (verses 13-15, 18, 20, 23). He proudly recalls the supreme sacrifice of forty half-starved Sikhs (**chali mukte**) who laid down their lives fighting a million Mughal soldiers near the Khidrana Dhab (renamed Muktsar). He ruefully notes the brutal murder of his sons but adds : “The snake you so much fear, still lives” (verse 78). He admonishes the Emperor not to gloat over his wordly possessions, not to misuse his power, not to be unjust to his

subjects but to solicit God's grace by way of repentance and noble deeds before it is too late (verses 65, 67, 70, 107-109).

After a long period of warfare, ending with the battle of Khidrana (1705) in which Guru Gobind Singh won conclusive victory over the troops of Wazir Khan, began a spell of comparative calm and peace marked by religious and literary activities. As the Guru got a breathing space (*dam*) for about nine months at Talwandi Sabo, the place became known as Damdama Sahib. Here the Guru patronised and confabulated with scholars of all hues, and according to popular belief, dictated afresh the hymns of Adi Granth to Bhai Mani Singh after the Sodhi clan of Kartarpur refused to part with the original scripture. He added the hymns of Guru Tegh Bahadur to the holy book and gave it a final shape. Sangat Singh holds that some recensions of latest version of Granth Sahib were prepared at Damdama Sahib and it was to one such recension that Guruship was finally passed, in 1708 by Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded. It is believed that some portions of the Dasam Granth attributed to Guru Gobind Singh were composed at Damdama. Since the place began to hum with scholarly pursuits, it became known as **Guru-Ki-Kashi** or the 'Varanasi of the Sikhs.'

Tradition says that the Guru once flung a few reed-pens on the ground at Damdama, and after sanctifying them observed that a mastermind would emerge from each shoot. To this day many profess that a nincompoop of the town is wiser than an outside scholar. While at Damdama, the Guru made short itineraries to nearby places, like Bhagi Bander, Kot Samir, Chak Bhai Ka, Bhatinda, Mahima, Bhokri, Tala Pind, Bhagu and Kewal.

Why did Guru Gobind Singh decide to leave Damdama for the Deccan? William Irvine's observation, based on the writing of some Persian chroniclers, that the Guru sent petitions to Aurangzeb making an offer to surrender and accept Islam, is blatantly false and unsubstantiated. *Ahkam-é-Alamgirī's* reference to Guru Gobind Singh's letter and the Emperor's response in the form of a directive to Munim Khan to conciliate him and make arrangements for his Journey to the Deccan perhaps alludes to the **Zafarnamah** or some other communication intended to acquaint the Emperor with the perfidy of Mughal satraps, like Wazir Khan, and the unwholesome activities of hill-kings in the region.

**The contents of the Zafarnamah are believed to have mollified the emperor who became self-reproachful, and hence he invited Guru Gobind Singh for a personal meeting with a view to sorting out contentious issues. Although the Guru's emissaries did not get a written reply, the Emperor issued orders for his safe passage to Ahmadnagar.**

Guru Gobind Singh left Damdama for the Deccan on 30 October 1706. He proceeded towards Sirsa passing through Kewal, Jhorar and Jhanda and then visited Haripur, Bada Tirath, Madhu Singhana, Nohar, Bhadra and Sahewa during the course of his travels. The last place was famous for the Jand (**prosopis cineraria**) having shoots of pipal tree on it. From Sahewa he went to Narayana, a well known centre of the Dadupanthi sect, and had a religious dialogue with its Mahant, Jait Ram. **When the Mahant questioned why he had taken to arms, the Guru replied that tyranny could be checked only by resorting to force.** As per tradition, the Guru bowed before the memorial (smadh) of Sant Dadu with an arrow, to which the Sikhs took exception and imposed a penalty on him. He acquiesced to their verdict, but informed them that he was only putting their belief in the existence of one God to test.

From Narayana he went to Kalayat, a place 52 km south-west of Bikaner, in north-west Rajasthan, where Bhai Daya Singh and Bhai Dharam Singh, who had been deputed to deliver the Zafarnamah to Aurangzeb, met him. From Kalayat he went to **Pushkar**, and ultimately reached **Baghaur**, on the banks of river Kothari in Rajasthan, on March 17, 1707.

But on learning about the death of Aurangzeb, and the consequent war of succession, he gave up the idea of going any further and decided to return to the Punjab, via Shahjahanbad (Delhi).

When Prince Muhammad Muazzam, eldest son of Aurangzeb, who had suffered a prolonged repression under his father, marched towards Delhi and Agra, the Guru despatched a group of Sikhs at his behest. The Sikh contingent under Dharam Singh helped the Prince to win the battle of Jajau, near Agra on 8 June 1707. Muazzam proclaimed himself as the Emperor of India, with the title of Bahadur Shah. When the Guru reached Delhi, the new Emperor had left for Agra. Guru Gobind Singh stayed for a while in Delhi, and then proceeded towards Agra. On his way, he visited Mathura and Vrindavan, associated with the birth and childhood of the Lord Krishna, and sacred to the Hindus.

**Bahadur Shah received Guru Gobind Singh with cordiality and presented him with a dress of honour, jewelled scarf and other lavish gifts. The Guru stayed in Agra for about four months and then went along with him during his campaign in Rajasthan and subsequently during his southward Journey.**

Why did Guru Gobind Singh keep company with Bahadur Shah? Was he in a state of melancholy after the loss of his dominion, death of his sons or depluming of his honour and wealth, as writers like Bute Shah would have us believe? Certainly not. One may recall that when the Guru's spouse lamented over the death of her sons he pointed towards the assembly of Sikhs and remarked : "Over the heads of these sons, I have sacrificed the four.

**What does it matter if four are killed when thousands of them still live." He never lost hope and would often say : "Each one of my Sikhs will fight one and a quarter lakhs or I will not be called Guru Gobind Singh".**

Did Guru Gobind Singh accept a rank in the Mughal army? Syad Muhammad Latif holds that he took employment under the Mughals. George Forster believes that Bahadur Shah commissioned him to suppress the rebellion of Kam Bakhsh in the Deccan. J.D. Cunningham avers that he perhaps saw in the imperial service, "a ready way of disarming suspicion and of recognising his followers".

**But all these views stem from bias, wrong inferences and distorted versions of fanatic writers. The**

***Tarikh-i-Bahadur Shahi* clearly states in this context: "At the time the army of Bahadur Shah was marching towards Burhanpur, Guru Gobind, one of the descendents of Nanak, had come into these districts to travel and accompanied the royal camp".** The fact that Guru Gobind Singh deputed Banda Singh Bahadur to punish the Mughal perpetrators of crime in Punjab, debunks the myth spread by the Guru's detractors that he had surrendered before the Mughal might by seeking royal service. John Malcolm writes : "I cannot even think that the Guru could have sunk into a servant of that government against which he had been in constant rebellion".

As a matter of fact, the Guru wanted to reopen the "old negotiations" with Bahadur Shah, and seek **justice with honour** against the perjury of Mughal officials. A communication which he sent from Agra to the Sikh sangat of Dhaul amply proves it. Later, when he realised the Emperor's inability to do the needful he decided not to proceed any further with him. Guru Gobind Singh accompanied Bahadur Shah when he marched against the Kacchwaha Rajputs, sometime in November 1707. But there is no evidence that he participated in any of the campaigns. He went to Amber, passing through Bharatpur and Daosa, and then proceeded towards Ajmer via Dahmi, Madanganj and Kishangarh. When the Emperor left Ajmer for Merta, the Guru got the opportunity to visit Pushkar, a famous Hindu centre of pilgrimage. **Gobind Ghat commemorates the visit.** While at Chittorgarh,

the Guru visited Udaipur, set in the Girwa valley amidst Aravalli hills.

After crossing the Narmada river, the Guru along with Bahadur Shah left for Burhanpur, a town on the banks of river Tapti and reached there on 13 May 1708. They passed through Nimbahera, Nayagaon, Nimach, Mulhargarh, Piplia, Mandasore, Ujjain and Indore.

**Gurdwara Bari Sangat commemorates the venue of Guru's encampment.**

From Burhanpur, the Guru proceeded to Amravati, and then to Hingoli, where he separated from Bahadur Shah and went to Nanded in eastern Maharashtra towards the end of August 1708. **He selected a spot overlooking the Godavari river and engaged himself in religious activities. He held mass congregations in the morning and evening where he exhorted the devotees not to yield before oppression, not to feel helpless in adverse circumstances, not to fear death or refrain from fighting for a righteous cause, and not to molest the women-folk of adversaries. He explained the code of conduct of the Khalsa which required each to believe in one God, to adhere to the truth, to wear the five k's, to disregard rituals and to shun smoking tobacco and promiscuity of all types. He utilized the service of *dhadis*, like Nath Mal, who sang ballads highlighting the gospel of the Sikh Gurus.**

At Nanded, Guru Gobind Singh met the 'Bairagi' recluse Madho Das, known for his occult powers. He was initiated into the fold of the Khalsa, renamed Banda Singh Bahadur and deputed to chastise the imperious governor of Sirhind, for which he was given a war drum, a banner and five arrows from his own quiver, as also an escort of five chosen Sikhs to guide him.

The earthly sojourn of Guru Gobind Singh was cut short by a mercenary of Wazir Khan who stabbed him at Nanded. But a day before his demise (7 October 1708) he ended the personal guruship and vested succession in **Sri Guru Granth Sahib**, the manifest body of the Gurus – the Guru Eternal. Henceforth, he said. **“The Guru's spirit will be in the Granth and the Khalsa. Where the Granth is with any five Sikhs representing the Khalsa, there will the Guru be.”**

**Nanded, one of the five apostolic seats of the Sikhs, also called Sri Hazur Sahib or Abichal Nagar, the city immortal, is a living testimony to the ethereal presence of the Tenth Master.**

