

MARTYRDOM OF GURU TEGH BAHADUR JI : A TURNING POINT IN THE SIKH RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

Guru Tegh Bahadur ascended the Gaddi as the Ninth Guru from Guru Nanak in a regular line of succession through Angad, Amardass, Ramdas, Arjun, Hargobind, HarRai and HarKrishan. Guru Tegh Bahadur's life was characterized by a fearless pursuit of the highest ideals of human existence and his martyrdom came as a culmination of that pursuit. Three hundred and fifty years ago he calmly sacrificed his life for the freedom of conscience and his example has become all the more precious with the passage of time. Guru ji set the unique record for a preceptor of religion willingly embracing martyrdom for redeeming another religion by accepting the challenge when some Brahmins from Kashmir approached him against Aurangzeb's satrap in Kashmir. Mughal emperor followed a policy of religious exclusiveness and intolerance which was in stark opposition to the Guru's policy of religious pluralism and acceptance. Guru put himself on the side with the oppressed and laid down his life standing witness to his conviction. The martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur was a momentous event and a turning point in the history of Sikh religion and community. The martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur had an electrifying effect on the Sikh community and, the other communities too. By sacrificing his life in protest against injustice to mankind, he set an enduring precedent of humanity based on truthfulness and godliness. It is from him that the Sikhs learnt to stand up for the weak and the underprivileged. His principles and value were upheld and taken forward by his son and the tenth master, Guru Gobind Singh, leading to the creation of the Khalsa. It is from there that the fight of righteousness and justice commenced. The present paper shed light on both the immediate and far reaching effects of martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadurji.

Key Words: Martyrdom, Oppressed, Miracle Justice, Khalsa

Guru Tegh Bahadur ascended the Gaddi as the Ninth Guru from Guru Nanak in a regular line of succession through Guru Angad, Amardass, Ramdas, Arjun, Hargobind, HarRai and Har Krishan. Guru Tegh Bahadur's life was characterized by a fearless pursuit of the highest ideals of human existence and his martyrdom came as a culmination of that pursuit. Guru Tegh Bahadur was the fifth and youngest son of the Sixth Sikh Divine Master, Guru Hargobind. The author of **Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin** has affirmed that on the auspicious occasion of Tegh Bahadur's birth Guru Hargobind invoked Akal Purkh to bestow on the new child unflinching courage to fight forces of evil and to work for the establishment of truth and Dharma to the last breath of his life.

By the time of Tegh Bahadur's birth Guru Hargobind had apparently established a working

rapport with the Mughal Emperor, Jehangir. He had accompanied him to Kashmir and now there was every hope that no untoward event would henceforward mar the good relations between the two. Emperor Jehangir died in 1627 A.D. and was succeeded by his son, Shah Jahan. With the accession of the new ruler who happened to be less tolerant than his father, the Mughal attitude towards Guru Hargobind changed for the worse. The change first found expression in certain minor clashes which came to pass during Shah Jahan's visit to Lahore in 1628 A.D. After a few years in 1634 A.D. (14 April) the first serious engagement between the two parties took place at Amritsar, in which the Guru, though greatly outnumbered, had the upper hand. A battle took place between the two parties at Marhaj (Lahira) on the 17th of the month of Poh, 1691 BK

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(16 December 1634). Once again Guru Hargobind's forces had the upper hand. The third battle (26th April, 1635 A.D.) that took place at Kartarpur, a rebellion General of Guru ji Painda Khan and the Mughal Commander both were killed and victory sided the Sikhs. Apart from the policy of persecution followed by Shah Jahan the other issues of conflict between them were an attempt by the Sikhs to found a new city on the river Beas and the theft of royal horses that were gifted to the Guru. In this way Mughal-Sikh relations had become worse. However Shah Jahan's eldest son Dara Shukoh was known to be an admirer of Guru Har Rai, who approached the Guru for help in the war for succession with his brother Aurangzeb. Having killed his brothers and put his father in Jail, Aurangzeb occupied the throne in July 1658 A.D. He consolidated his position as a king in a period of 6 to 7 years. Then he changed his religious policy. Aurangzeb was a staunch conservative Sunni Muslim who considered India as Dar-ul-Harb (The land of the infidels) and wanted to make it Dar-ul-Islam (Country of Islam). Haig draws the picture of the religious policies of Aurangzeb in the following words: "Aurangzeb was a bigot to whom the religion of the great majority of his subjects was anathema, mischief, idolatry, which it was his duty before heaven to persecute and if possible to stamp out. His methods were iconoclasm, sacrilege, economic repression, bribery, forced conversion and restriction of worship".

He issued instructions to his governors to launch a mass conversion drives of Hindus and ensure that not a single Hindu was left in his kingdom. The Hindu temples were to be razed to the ground and mosques erected in their place instead. The Hindu idols had to be desecrated, destroyed, or buried. The King-Emperor did not want to see any tilak (holy mark on the forehead) or janaeu (Sacred thread) on any of his subjects. It is said that the sacred threads of the Hindus converted to Islam by Sher Afghan, the Governor of Kashmir, weighed a maund and a quarter. It was by design that Aurangzeb ordered mass conversions to start from Kashmir. Kashmiri Brahmins were known to be most orthodox and also highly erudite. The emperor thought that if they would accept Islam,

others in the country would be converted readily. The more important consideration was that Kashmir had the tribals of Kabul and Kandhar next door. The tribals were illiterate religious fanatics ferocious and wild. If the Hindus of Kashmir misbehaved, a jihad could be raised and non-believers subdued with the sword.

The Kashmiri Brahmins who were ruthlessly persecuted by the local Mughal Governor Sher Afghan met the 9th Guru at Anandpur Sahib and asked for his protection. Guru ji asked the delegation to go and tell Aurangzeb that if the Emperor is able to convert him to Islam, the Hindu would follow the suit willingly. This enraged Aurangzeb who ordered the Guru to be brought to Delhi. The Mughals arrested him at Ropar and took him to Delhi. Here, Guru ji was asked either to embrace Islam or show some miracle of his Guruship. On account of his refusal, Guru ji was beheaded at Delhi in 1675 A.D.

The martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur was a momentous event and a turning point in the history of Sikh religion and community. The martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur had an electrifying effect on the Sikh community and, the other communities too. By sacrificing his life in protest against injustice to mankind, he set an enduring precedent of humanity based on truthfulness and godliness. It is from him that the Sikhs learnt to stand up for the weak and the underprivileged. His principles and values were upheld and taken forward by his son and the tenth master, Guru Gobind Singh. With the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Sikhism was threatened with extinction, root and branch, and there was no other method of self-defence except the use of arms. The situation needed a leader under whose banner the Sikhs could give a taste of their steel to the fanatic persecutors of their race, and avenge the insult done to their religion. This leader was found in Guru Gobind Singh.

It was, thus, clear to Guru Gobind Singh that the only way to save the Sikhs and Sikhism from extinction was to oppose and cripple the power of the fanatic Mughals. This, he knew, was a gigantic, arduous task, armed resistance was the only course left to him. But what were the means at his disposal? Before the might of the Mughals he seemed verily

like the tiniest sparrow before a flight of the mightiest eagles. To oppose and cripple that power successfully, and to bring it low enough to heed the welfare of all its subjects, was like attempting to cut through a huge mountain with a tiny needle.

After years of the preparation and thoughtful planning Guru Goind Singh ji gave a practical shape to his decision in 1699 by converting the peaceful sect of spiritual devotees into a well disciplined and well-organised military order. By creating Khalsa, Guru ji wanted to rear a “Self-contained and compact body of men” who would be pure enough to free themselves from the oppression of priests and rulers and would, at the same time, strong enough to maintain that freedom. He called his Khalsa, ‘A Band of Saint Soldiers’ as the rosaries of the lovers of God were yield place to the sword, so that these men of God would be able to defend themselves as well as their weak fellow beings.

The founding of Khalsa initiated a new phase in the Sikh tradition. Aninitiation ceremony (Amrit Pehul, nectar ceremony) and rules of conduct for the Khalsa warriors were formulated. The worriers Saints of Guru Ji got an exterior so specific and distinctive that even a single one of them would be distinguishable among millions, so that, by a mere look at him, one should be able to say, ‘There goes a Sikh of the Guru’. The Khalsa created new institution for the temporal leadership of the Sikhs, replacing the earlier mas and system. Additionally, the Khalsa provided a political and religious vision for the Sikh community.

The creation of the Khalsa had a miraculous effect in uplifting the depressed and down trodden communities. The members of the low castes who were regarded as unclean and polluted in the Hindu society became leaders among men of high birth. The creation of the Khalsa made all the Sikhs equal. They considered themselves as blood relations having acquired common heritage from their common Gurus. The external marks of Sikhism i.e, the five K’s gave them a sense of brotherhood, equality and religious unity. Their eating in the common kitchen, sitting together, gave a death-blow to the caste system. The Great Guru laid the

foundation of a brotherhood, which produced in the fullness of time, men of uncommon bravery, unique and devotion and rare spirit of sacrifice. Men like Banda Bahadur, Bhai Mani Singh, Baba Deep Singh, Bhai Taru Singh and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia were among them which the Khalsa produced within only fifty years after its inception. The Khalsa freed the Sikhs from superstitions and unnecessary ritual practices. They had no faith in idol worship and life of ostentations.

Conclusion

The execution of Guru Teg Bahadurji and subsequently the birth of the Khalsa proved to be a turning point in the Sikh religion which defended universal principles, and humanity’s rights to religious social behaviours, which further led to the oneness of humankind irrespective of tribe, race, ethnicity or belief; the sanctity of human dignity; the equality of men and women; freedom from racial and religious prejudice; commitment to knowledge and learning; the containment of narcissism and greed; the harmony of faith and reason; awakening of universal consciousness and, belief in progressive and prosperous future of all civil societies. The institution of Khalsa, in Sikhism, has the stamp of this emancipator logic, and holds the promise for oppressed people across the globe to cast off their thralldom, and never to be afraid, for the Victory belongs to God. This defining characteristic of Sikhism offers the best assurance and certitude for the future of our civilization.

ਧਨ ਧਨ ਹਰਿ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਹਮਾਰਾ ਜਿਨ ਵੈਰੀ
ਮਿਤ੍ਰ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਸਭ ਸਮ ਦਿਸਟਿ ਦਿਖਾਈ

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, p. 594)

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