

### **Guru Gobind Singh: 1666- 1708**

Gobind Singh was the tenth and the last Sikh Guru. He was born in 1666 at Patna, in the East India province of Bihar. He was named Gobind Rai. He became Guru on the martyrdom of his father (Guru Tegh Bahadur) in 1675. His father was beheaded on orders from Emperor Aurangzeb, in a Public place in Delhi (Chandni Chowk). This is the same person who killed all his brothers and imprisoned his ailing father (Emperor Shah Jehan, the builder of Taj Mahal) for life so that he could crown himself the Emperor of India. Aurangzeb was a fanatic Muslim bent upon spreading Islam in India at the point of sword. He introduced a heavy serf tax (Jazzia); all non-muslims had to pay this tax for the privilege of living in a Muslim State (their own country) and ordered a whole-scale destruction of the property and places of worship of non-muslims. Since Sikh philosophy (respect for human rights) was considered a serious threat to the authority of the Emperor, they became a target of his wrath. One can imagine the challenge that faced the (child) Guru Gobind Rai as the spiritual leader of the Sikhs. At this point I would like to remind the reader that Guru Hargobind (6th Sikh Guru, the father of Guru Tegh Bahadur) had imbibed a spirit of self-defence in the Sikh community; refer to Miree-Piree STORY of Guru Hargobind.

Gobind Rai was the most remarkable God-man of his time! He took upon himself the mission to uphold the rights of the downtrodden and human dignity of Indians. His whole life was devoted towards fulfillment of this mission. He was the most highly educated Sikh Guru, having mastered six languages, Sanskrit, Prakrit, Brig Bhasha, Persian, Hindi and Punjabi. He was a prolific writer and a gifted Poet. In his brief life span of 43 years, Gobind Rai left behind a body of literature that is the envy of the best, even by modern standards. After a deep thought of several years, he came up with the idea of, 'Saint Warriors.' He visualized them as, "Strong in Body, Mind, and Spirit, with God's name on their lips and love for fellow humans in their hearts. They would oppress none and be afraid of none. They were to be ever-ready to fight against the mental, social, and political bondage no matter what the source and no matter what the odds.' In short, Sikhs were to become the standard bearers of human rights. Gobind Rai founded the Khalsa Panth (the order of the Pure Ones) on the Vaisakhi day in 1699 at Anandpur when he was thirty-three years old. He considered this task as the crowning glory of the work begun by Guru Nanak, nearly two centuries before him. In baptizing the first five Khalsas (Punj Mukte) into the new brotherhood (everyone is called Bhai), he enjoined on them, "From today onwards you belong to a new race of Saint Warriors. To help the weak, the needy, and the oppressed shall be your sacred duty. All your previous castes are erased from today onwards. You all belong to one family, for you all are my sons both in flesh and spirit. You shall not worship stones, idols, tombs, gods or goddesses. You shall neither practice nor consent to slavery or SATI (*the practice of SATI had been banned for Sikhs by the second Sikh Guru Angad much earlier*). You shall not beg alms or charity. You shall preserve your God given form intact and shall always wear:

KESH (long, uncut, unshaven hair), KANGA (a comb to keep the hair neat and tidy), KACCHA (breeches reaching knees), KARA (a steel bracelet on wrist, a symbol of belonging to God and Guru), and KIRPAN (a sword on your waist) to be wielded only for the defense of Dharma and the weak but NEVER in forcing your faith or views on others. You must not take intoxicants. Each of you shall love his wedded wife and not covet another woman. I have given you my form and my glory. I baptize you the KHALSA. Guru and Khalsa are one for ever. Wherever any five of you shall assemble, with God's name in your hearts, I shall be with you. Any five of you together may henceforth baptize others into the Khalsa Panth." He then proceeded to be baptized by the five Khalsas he had just created and changed his (and others') name from Gobind Rai to Gobind Singh; each Sikh male now bears the title Singh (Lion) as a

part of his name. Guru Gobind Singh thus set an example of a religious democracy in which all Khalsas were equal in all respects and in all spheres of life. For some, this event indicates that Guru Gobind Singh may have already decided that he would be the last Sikh Guru.

Guru Gobind Singh was an able general and an efficient organizer of men. He changed ordinary people (the former 'low castes') into the sturdiest of warriors that the world has ever seen. Under his tutelage Khalsas became the leaders of armies before whom the mightiest rulers cowered in terror. In short, he grafted the courage of a soldier into the devotee of God; he taught a vanquished people how to obtain political ascendancy and freedom. Such a transformation of humans has rarely been witnessed in History; he was a lawgiver in pulpit, a champion in battlefield and a fakir in the company of the Khalsas. So, Guru Gobind Singh may be considered a nation builder. Guru Nanak had conceived the plan of welding the Indian populace into a nation but it was Guru Gobind Singh who implemented that vision. Guru Gobind Singh required of the Khalsa to be:

- *kirat nash*, no honest profession was in itself to be deemed ignoble or exalted.
- *dharm nash*, all beliefs and rituals inconsistent with Guru's teaching were to be abandoned. The injunction was meant to discourage the formation of sects and cults.
- *kul nash*, no pride of high birth or stigma of low birth was to haunt a Khalsa.
- *karam nash*, no spiritual advancement by performing rituals or escape from the dire consequences of one's evil actions.

In the new order, he who performed the lowliest service (SEWA) along with being a devout Khalsa was worthy of the highest honor; remember the Nawab Kapur Singh STORY!

This revolutionary doctrine imbued with the loftiest religious ideals (with a paramilitary organization to back it up) sent a shock wave through the rulers of the land. No longer could they kill defenseless, illiterate people unaware of their philosophical and cultural heritage. The Guru and his followers were hounded like criminals. In the wars that followed the Guru lost his two older sons (14 and 18 years old) on the battle-field. His two minor sons (7 and 9 years old) fell into enemy hands and were brutally murdered when they refused to embrace Islam. It is a long story and I shall not attempt to go into details here. It is interesting to note that when Guru's wife protested to him the loss of their four sons, the Guru is said to have replied, "What if the four are gone! Thousands of our dear brave sons (the Khalsa Panth) are alive and shall live for ever."

Sadly, Guru Gobind Singh was not destined to see the rise of the Khalsa power in Punjab at the expense of the Mughals and other invaders from the northwest of India; he was stabbed at Nanded (also called Abchal Nagar: the Eternal City) on the banks of the River Godavari, in the former Hyderabad State, in South India, by a Pathan (some say, sent by Wazir Khan, the Nawab of Sirhind and the murderer of Guru's two minor sons). The wound proved fatal. When Guru felt his end was near he performed a ceremony transferring his spiritual authority to Adi Granth (that he had revised at Damdama Sahib to include Guru Teg Bahadur's verses, 'Salok Mahala 9') with a parting advice to the Sikhs: "With permission from the Immortal One, I formed the Khalsa Panth and nourished it. I require of all my Sikhs to consider the (Word in the) Granth as the Guru. Henceforth the Guru Granth is to be considered an embodiment of all the Sikh Gurus in a visible form for all times to come. Anyone seeking God shall find the key in the WORD." Thus Sikhs became the people of the BOOK (Shree Guru Granth Sahib). They treat SGGS as a living Guru and seek its 'wisdom for the day' at the start and the end of Sikh worship every day, at every Gurudwara, and in every Sikh home.

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