

Guru Gobind Singh And Second Evolution Of Sikh Culture; H.S. Ahluwalia, PhD, FAPS.

Nanak Dev (1469-1539), first Sikh mentor (Guru) advised his students (Sikhs) that TRUTH resides in the IMMORTAL one, hence one should always seek the TRUTH and practice TRUTHFUL living. This is a **prescient** statement considering that Science did not exist when Guru Nanak lived. Science is an inherently careful and skeptical pursuit that leads to a verifiable TRUTH as implied in the *Vars* composed by the bard Bhai Gurdas Bhalla (1551-1636); he was Bibi Bhanee's cousin and the first *Jatheddar of Akal Takht*. As an article of faith this makes Sikhi a living faith because search for the TRUTH is unending.

Guru Nanak's emphasis on TRUTHFUL Living for the Sikhs enabled his successors to change the culture of the community in a very progressive way, as needed from time to time. For example, 3rd Guru Amar Das (1479-1574), engineered the first evolution of Sikh culture by empowering women during his ministry. Today I shall describe the history of the 2nd evolution of Sikh culture initiated by 6th Guru Hargobind (1595-1645). He was eleven years old when his father (5th Guru Arjan Dev, 1563-1581) was tortured by sadist minions of the Mughal empire using barbaric means by making him sit on an iron plate heated from below. After the session ended he was allowed to bathe in the river Ravi, his body was never recovered. In a parting advice to his son, Guru Arjan warned him of turbulent period ahead and suggested that he should take appropriate measures to protect himself and the Sikhs to the best of his ability. As a leader of the community in deep shock at the brutal murder of their beloved Guru, Hargobind (then 11 years old) decided to initiate a 2nd evolution of Sikh culture; he enjoined on the Sikhs to acquire training in martial arts as a part of normal living to defend themselves against oppression and injustice. A peaceful people were thus forced to take defensive measures to resist evil. This evolution in Sikh culture accelerated under the leadership of 10th Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708); his father (9th Guru Tegh Bahadur, 1621-1675) was beheaded in a public square (Chandni Chowk) in Delhi on orders from the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (1618-1707) when Guru Tegh Bahadur refused to embrace Islam.

Guru Gobind Singh was the most highly educated Sikh Mentor; he 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, Guru Gobind Singh left behind a body of literature that is the envy of the best, even by modern standards. But, he had no exposure to the scientific thought; Science was brought to India during British rule. After a deep thought, he came up with the idea of 'Saint Warriors' whom he baptized as 'Khalsa Panth.' 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, the Khalsas were to become the standard bearers of human rights. Guru Gobind Singh was an able general, an efficient organizer of men who changed ordinary people into the sturdiest of warriors 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 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 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. He required of the Khalsas to be:

- *kirat nash*, no honest profession was in itself to be deemed ignoble or exalted.
- *dharm nash*, all beliefs and rituals inconsistent with Gurus' 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 deeds.

In the new order, he who performed the lowliest service (SEWA) along with being a devout Khalsa was worthy of the highest honor (a good example is the Nawab Kapur Singh story). This revolutionary doctrine imbued with the loftiest ideals (with a paramilitary organization to back it up) sent a shock wave through the rulers of the land (the Mughals), no longer could they kill defenseless, illiterate people unaware of their cultural heritage. The Guru and his followers were hounded like criminals. In the wars that ensued he lost two older sons (14 and 18 years old) on the battle-field and two minor sons (7 and 9 years old) fell into enemy hands and were murdered when they refused to embrace Islam. It is interesting to note that when Guru's wife protested to him the loss of their four sons, he 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 forever."

Guru Gobind Singh was not destined to see the rise of the Khalsa power at the expense of the Mughals and other invaders from the northwest of India. He was stabbed at Nanded (Abchal Nagar: Eternal City) on the banks of the River Godavari in Andhra Pradesh by a Pathan sent by Wazir Khan, the Nawab of Sirhind (murderer of his two minor sons). The wound proved fatal. When he felt his end was near, he performed a ceremony transferring his spiritual authority to the Adi Granth (compiled by Guru Arjan) after including verses (Shalok Mahala 9) composed by his father, 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 their Mentor; it is to be considered an embodiment of all Gurus in a visible form for the eternity. Anyone seeking God shall find the key in the WORD." Thus, Sikhs became the people of the BOOK: Shree Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS), treating it as a living Mentor; they seek 'wisdom for the day' at the start and end of worship at every Gurudwara and in every Sikh home.

Sadly, the Sikhs have been poorly led after Guru Gobind Singh, starting with Banda. Caste system and use of alcohol and opioids is rampant among them. Charlatans with self-assumed titles like Guru, Baba, Yogi, Giani claiming mantel of 'enlightened mentors' continue to prey upon the unsuspecting (mostly uneducated) victims with impunity, misleading the community into embracing false beliefs, founding sects, factions, cults, idol worship, etc. Even Maharaja Ranjit Singh a brave soldier and a devout Sikh failed to establish democracy in his kingdom as envisaged by Guru Gobind Singh. The historic Gurudwaras have become Power Centers (controlled by pseudo-Khalsas) rather than Service Centers envisaged by the Gurus. These days the community consists of 'turbaned Sikhs' who follow some edicts of the Khalsa and Sikhs who do not wear turban but they both believe in SGGS. The Sikhs have to re-dedicate themselves to search for the TRUTH. The search leads to knowledge with power to make the world more equitable with humans leading long, peaceful, and prosperous lives. I wish our brothers and sisters a very HAPPY Baisakhi! May the rest of year be Healthy, Productive, Prosperous for you.