

The Guru's Way of Life

I pen here whatever I have gleaned about the Guru's personality and life history. He was sturdy and of a somewhat hefty build. He was tall and looked powerful by appearance and body-structure, he interested himself in tasks involving effort and hard labour. He loved the hunting field more than the sermonising seat of Guruship and spent a greater part of his time in hunting. He always endeavoured to interest and involve his Sikhs in hunting. He hunted the wild boar, the lion and other wild beasts.

He always practised the wielding of weapons, in which he was highly skilled, and encouraged his Sikhs to take to arms. He made his Sikhs practise their use under his personal supervision. The acquisition of skill in the use of weapons formed an essential part of the education of his sons. He used to feel great pleasure in receiving the gifts of weapons and horses from his Sikhs and such offerings endeared the Sikhs to him. He was fond of keeping good horses and his stable contained some thorough-breds. He was a skilled rider par excellence. After much practice he had gained mastery in the use of the bow and the sword. While hunting, he used the *scimitar*, the small dagger, the two-edged sword and the spear with great dexterity.

He used to hold court like nobles and dressed himself in very fine apparel like a king. He had a regal bearing and carried a sword at his waist. He was an excellent poet and composed verses in almost all the *metres* that were prevalent at that time. His verses were a very forceful-medium to inspire and enthuse his listeners. His epics on the wars between Durga and the demons were very stimulating and filled the listeners with courage and martial fervour. He had gathered around him a group of fifty two eminent poets of his time, who wrote and recited their verses and received due appreciation both in words and in terms of money.

In addition to his penchant for penning and perusing poetry, he was fond of hearing the old classics. He was very well acquainted with Persian and Arabic and had attained a high degree of proficiency in Sanskrit. He loved to hear readings from books on history, especially the chapters dealing with wars, and he spent a lot of time in this pursuit. Recitals from Vedas, Up-Vadas, Upnishidas, Puranas and Simritis interested him and he listened to them with loving attention. He kept poets and pundits (learned scholars) around him. He sent many of his Sikhs to Kashi to get education.

He was not such a great lover of classical music as Guru Nanak Dev Ji, but he daily listened to the singing of *Shabads*. He was very fond of Martial music and listened with rapt attention to the musical renditions of war epics by the bards at his court. He was very steadfast in the performance of his daily duties. He used to rise early in the morning and recite Japuji, Jaap Sahib and Sawayye. In the evening he dutifully recited Rehrass and Kirtan Sohila. He used to spend some time daily in the praise of Akal.

The Guru was never to be seen taking part in dancing and other festivities during Holi. He had no inclination towards frivolous modes of merry-making and luxurious living. Self control and simplicity were the key notes of his character.

Those Who Embraced the Khalsa

The directions of Guru Gobind Singh and the system of the Khalsa Dharma had become very popular among Jats and other Hindu communities. It's simple and clear rules and advocacy of an open and free way of living was so effective that thousands of people joined its fold. The Jats who were considered no higher than the Shudras by the high-caste Hindus rushed towards this fount of brotherhood like a thirsty man dashing towards a fountain of water. The Guru had earnestly embarked on this mission impelled by Truth and *strong feelings of love for the oppressed* Hindus. The people at large appreciated his mission and devoted efforts, and they responded enthusiastically to his call. The number of his Sikhs grew daily. There is no doubt that the Khalsa Dharma had a strong appeal for those low-caste people who were considered worthless, low beings, no better than chattels meant for menial chores and who were never assigned any worthwhile job.

The Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh was a group of people who *were determined and daring, truthful and trustworthy, and dedicated and devoted to their Guru and Dharma.* They proved their mettle and credentials time and again. The high castes had kept themselves aloof and hence the qualities mentioned above could not be attributed to their inclusion. In fact, these people had over a long period of bondage and subjection to persistent tyranny lost whatever good qualities they ever had. The Kashatris, once known for their fighting prowess, valour and self-respect, were offering their daughters, *willingly and with some sort of pride, to the Muslims.* The Brahmins were ready to sacrifice their country in order to save their dhoti from disrespect and were not perturbed over the sale of their women in the bazars of Ghazni for petty sums of two dinars. These communities could not be said to contribute to the wonderful qualities of Khalsa.

The Khalsa were a people ready to sacrifice their all for the welfare of others and for their country and Dharma. *They held life cheap before the ideals of love and universal brotherhood.* They would not hesitate to raise a big pile of their bones and flesh to serve as a high pedestal for their nation and country. They wanted to cleanse with their blood the indignities of the last seven hundred years, animate the corpse of nationalism with the warmth of their spouting gore. Since the Khalsa comprised mainly of people drawn from the low castes and Shudras, the Hill Rajas, proud of their prowess and position, jeered at the Guru. Scornfully they asked him if he proposed to defend the country with the help of these sparrows and pit his jackals against the formidable tigers. The Guru replied, "Unless I raise one

to stand against many, cause sparrow spurn the hawk and inspire jackals to kill lions, I shall not deserve to be called Guru Gobind Singh."

There is difference of opinion about the occasion where the Guru uttered these words. But there is no doubt that he did utter them and proved them true by time and again making his handful of Sikhs fight against vast multitudes of adversaries on the battle-field. His followers were made of sterner stuff, forged in a steely mould of courage. We have already seen an example of their mettle provided by the 'Five Beloveds' at the time of the formation of the Khalsa. Later events gave ample proof of the fearlessness, the courage and the martial qualities of the Khalsa. Two incidents taken at random will suffice. They occurred in the presence of the Guru.

Once Guru Gobind Singh was sitting in his court, one of his Sikhs presented a gun to him. The Guru declared all of a sudden that he wanted to test his aim and desired some Sikh to offer himself as a target. Many- Sikhs got up and pleaded forcefully for the acceptance of their respective offers.

Directing his glance and pointing to a Sikh, the Guru smilingly ordered him to be taken away and hanged immediately. Neither did he give any reason for this strange decision nor did he hint at offence committed by the Sikh, but only vouchsafed that his Guru needed his head. Without any hesitation that Sikh offered his head. The Guru was highly pleased and declared that only such obedient, true and steadfast Sikhs can save the Hindu nation.