

Meeting Banda Bahadur

Parting company with the Emperor, and passing through many places, he reached Nanded. Madho Dass alias Narain Dass Bairagi, a Hindu Faqir, lived there. The Guru met him and found in him a great potential for fighting and the requisite guts and fervour for sacrificing himself for the defence of the downtrodden Hindus and their Dharma. The Guru made Madho Dass his Shishya (a Sikh) but did not administer Pahul (Amrit) to him perhaps with a view to closing the chapter of Guruship and forestalling any claim to Gurudom by him, later on. The fact of Madho's not having been given Pahul would deter the Khalsa from upholding such a claim if ever made by him in time to come.* The Guru gave him the name of Banda and sent him to Sirhind. The Guru wrote to many Sikhs urging them to give active support to Banda in his mission. He detailed a large group of Sikhs to accompany Banda Singh to the Punjab.

At the time of sending off Banda, Guru Gobind Singh made him to take five vows (1) of remaining a celibate, (2) of never telling a lie, (3) of not starting a new sect or instituting guruship, (4) of not sitting on the seat of guruship, and (5) of treating Sikhs as his brethren and equals. He wrote to Sikhs in general to join him. Guru Gobind Singh bestowed his sword on him.

Guru Gobind Singh, who was still alive when Banda Bahadur embarked upon his mission, learnt of the plunder and the devastation of Sirhind at the hands of Banda. The Guru evinced neither elation nor satisfaction over it. To him, this act was unworthy of his noble mission. Secondly, a man who had been sent to bear hardships for the good and betterment of others and to be indifferent to his own worldly happiness could not feel joy and satisfaction over such poor, negative achievement.

* This view is refuted by a host of historians, old and modern, Punjabi, Indian and Europeans, Muslims and Hindus, who wrote in English, Persian and vernacular, e.g. Forester, James Brown, Mc'Gregor, Mohammad Latif, Gulam Hussain Khan, Iradat Khan, Kanhya Lal, Sharda Ram Phillauri, Ahmed Shah Batalvi, Zaka-Ullah, Ganesh Dass Wadehra, Ali-u-Din Mufti. All these references have been quoted by Dr.Ganda Singh in his book *Banda Singh Bahadur* (Punjabi) where he writes that Guru Gobind Singh bestowed the boon of Amrit on Madho Dass and called him Banda Singh and honoured him with the title of 'Bahadur'. Giani Sohan Singh in his book *Banda Singh Shahial* (Punjabi) quotes many more Indian and foreign writers To support of the administering of Pahul to Banda

In reality, Guru Gobind Singh had come to show people that the heaven of sacrifice and suffering produces calmness and content. He did not live long enough to witness the successful achievements of Banda Bahadur. He received that summons from his Akal for which all of us should ever be ready.

Attracted by the natural beauty of the area around the banks of Godavari, Guru Gobind Singh set up his camp there. Later on, he bought a piece of land there and built a house on it. He called this place Afzal Nagar also known as Abchal Nagar. A Mandir in that area too is known by this name till today. The Guru stayed there for quite some time and his Sikh disciples started trickling in from the surrounding areas. The Guru spent his mornings in Kirtan (singing of Shabads). At noon after taking his meals, he daily distributed food among the needy. On occasions he would go out hunting because he wanted his Sikhs to be alive to the need of fostering fighting capabilities in them and keeping themselves in good shape. By his daily routine, he set before his Khalsa an example of good conduct — of how one should spend one's life in Lordworship, in helping the needy and indigent and in doing courageous and bold deeds.

The Guru received here the news of the killing of the Subedar of Sirhind at the hands of Banda Bahadur in the battle on the 13th Jeth of Samat 1764 (1707 A.D.). The Sikhs were overjoyed to hear this news which according to them was an act of vengeance. But the Guru heard the news with serenity and opined that the command of Lord Akal has been carried out. His face bore no expression of jubilation. A heart which is indifferent to sorrow, which is unperturbed by hardships, grief and toil, cannot be carried away by any feelings of joy over trivial successes. The Guru was basically a kind-hearted man who could not be pleased by the shedding of anyone's blood. But a sharp distinction must be made between being trigger- happy and shedding blood in the performance of one's duty. The appreciation of this distinction had often forced him to take to difficult and dangerous paths for the success of his mission.

Brutal Attack on the Guru

Bahadur Shah passed through Nanded after the annexation of Ahmed Nagar and the completion of the Deccan campaign. He met Guru Gobind Singh and tried to take him along, but the Guru declined to accompany him. The power and existence of Guru Gobind Singh was rankling in the mind of the Emperor, who well knew what the mission of the Guru was and earnestly wanted to exterminate him. The Emperor was waiting an opportune time. The exploits of Banda

Bahadur made the Emperor feel further threatened by the existence of the Guru, so he planned for the physical liquidation of the Guru. After setting the wheel of conspiracy in motion, the Emperor removed himself from the scene. *He had incited one Turkish youth to despatch the Guru who had killed his father and grandfather and it was the primal duty of a Muslim to avenge the murder of his ancestors.* The Emperor had further reproached the youth for his shamelessness in serving the killer of his forebears. To accentuate the effect of his goadings, the Emperor added the tempting offer of honours and regards for the successful completion of the conspiracy.*

This Turkish Muslim was called Gull Khan and he along with his brother Atta-Allah-Khan, was in the service of the Guru. They were the descendants of one Paindey Khan, who had been killed by the Guru in one of his many battles. This conspiracy had taken a strong hold on the minds of these two Turks and worked successfully because the Guru trusted them. On the fourth of Bhadon of Samat 1765 (1708 A.D.), finding the Guru asleep and unattended by anyone else, Gull Khan thrust his dagger deep into the Guru's stomach. The Guru stood up wounded, and pressing his wound with one hand and taking hold of his sword with the other struck a telling blow on his assailant, killing him on the spot.

* Historians have averred that this conspiracy was hatched by the Subedar of Sirhind.

The wound was not very dangerous but had been inflicted in a very sensitive part of the body. The Sikhs gathered around their Guru in no time.

A surgeon was sent for who stitched the wound and dressed it. The wound started healing and there were distinct signs of recovery after some days. But the Guru tried his hand at archery one day, with the result that the wound was reopened and inflammation set in. Despite all curative measures, the wound started deteriorating with the result that the Guru's health steadily declined.

Thus, the Guru, stabbed by his enemies, sealed his Document of Love, with his own gory signature. He had started writing this Legacy to his Nation with the ink formed out of the sacrifice of all his ease and happiness mixed with his heart's blood, on the paper of devotion to the nation, with the pen of patriotic fervour. This Document had been witnessed and signed by his two elder sons and the Five Beloveds with

their blood. His remaining two innocent and tender sons had testified it with their blood. The whole process of writing had commenced with the blood of Guru Teg Bahadur, the father of the Guru. The contents were written with the blood of the two elder sons of Guru Gobind Singh, while his two tender sons of ages seven and nine testified it with their blood. The Guru with his own gore wrote finis on it.

This elegy (funeral song) of the Emperor of the Khalsa had its Title written in blood. Its every dot, every word and every line was written with the blood that shall not dry till eternity.

All efforts to heal the Guru's wound proved unavailing. When the Guru felt that his hour was approaching, he asked for a coco-nut and five paise as per stipulations which he placed before the Holy Granth and enjoined the Khalsa that from then onwards, the Holy Granth shall be their only one Guru, their Eternal Guru who shall ever protect them and guide them in all matters, that they should never accept any other guru, should never bow before anyone or any granth other than the Guru Granth Sahib. His injunction was that they should ever remain steadfast and true to their faith, that he would be there in spirit where his five Sikhs gather and that these five shall be vested with the authority to administer Amrit (Pahul) to the seekers and make them members of the Khalsa Fraternity.

Ending of the Guruship in Person

In this manner the sagacious and farsighted Guru ended the cycle of succession to Guruship. He could feel the pulse of the people and the temper of the times. By putting this bar, he saved the Sikhs from future degeneration, dissensions and divisions. That is why the Khalsa Dharma has kept its purity during these three hundred years. The devolution of the power of bestowing of Pahul on five Sikhs was a great democratic step which saved the Sikhs from the ills of gurudom which had eaten into the vitals of the Hindu Dharma invested with multitudes of gurus in the form of Brahmins. The Guru was well aware of this fact and could never allow this evil to afflict the Khalsa. So, he decided to abolish gurudom for ever and did it in a very effective manner.

Last days of the Guru

On the next day, the 15th of Kartik of Samat 1765, Guru Gobind Singh bathed himself, dressed and armed himself, said his prayers and heard kirtan. Then he stretched himself on his bed and listening to the recital of Bani from Guru Granth Sahib, breathed his last uttering the last words, "Wahe-Guru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wahe-Guru Ji Ki Fateh". Thus, he poured the final *Ahuti* of his body

in the Sacrificial Fire which he had lit for the betterment of the Hindus. On that day was set the special sun of the Hindus which had enabled them to see clearly with their own eyes, whose warmth had brought spring into their withered garden with its wilted plants supporting drooping twigs and leaves, and engendered fresh sprouts.

This Sun had set in the darkness of death. That lightning singing patriotic songs in the storm clouds of hope disappeared, the down pour of the soothing rain of nationalism that was helping to cool the burning hearts of the Hindus and to extinguish the fire of acrimonious dissensions sweeping across the country, was driven away by the tempest of Death. The river whose overflowing currents were promising plenty and prosperity in the drought-despoiled fields of India, was submerged in a devastating flood. The great soul which had come to revive India, was whisked away; the heart full of love for the Hindus, ever zealous and ready to spill its blood for their welfare, was stilled. Alas! The True Lover, the True Well-Wisher, the True Friend of the Hindus, the True Consoler, the Loving Helper, and the Real Benefactor of the Indians closed his eyes for ever. But he had planted the sapling of Nationalism, had watered it with his blood and had manured it with his bones. The sapling took roots, grew fast into a robust tree and eventually bore a plenteous crop of rich fruit.

The deep love, determination and faith with which he had embarked upon his mission and which had sustained his assiduous efforts, bore fruit at last. The string of sacrifice that took toll of the members of his family — his father, his mother, his four sons and of his own life, was crowned at last with success. The Guru died in the flush of real achievement. He had gained the goal he had set before him and exerted himself to achieve. The creation, growth and steady rise to glory of his Khalsa testifies to the successful culmination of his efforts. He died fully conscious that he had set wheels in motion as he had wanted to, that he had carried out the mandate of his Lord Akal. He had done his duty, to the people and to the Country as ordained by his Akal.

Shivaji Maratha was his contemporary. Their aims and objective are often compared and it is erroneously concluded that the Guru was comparatively unsuccessful in his mission. All facets and aspects of their efforts, the situations involved, the angles involved in their mission whether personal or national or a clever combination of both, their principles and scruples should be taken

into account while comparing them with each other. *Shivaji undoubtedly was impelled by the motive of national good but underneath lay very selfish undercurrents of gaining power.* While Guru Gobind Singh had no such ulterior motives intermixed with his mission. He did not want to carve a kingdom to perpetuate a dynasty like Shivaji. He, on the other hand, sacrificed whatever he had, sacrificed his sons, thus ending his dynasty for the sake of his country and the welfare of his countrymen. Shivaji worked for gaining political power, though in some degree nationalism was involved in it. Guru Gobind Singh fought on all the four fronts, remaining in the fore-fronts in each, the social, political, religious and military. He never resorted to any subterfuge in any of his actions in these fields.

The main aim of the Guru was to uplift the down-trodden low castes and make them atleast the equals if not the betters of the high castes by making them the devotees of one Formless Lord, united in the brotherhood of man. Shivaji was not inspired by any such lofty ideals of Brotherhood of man and worship of the Formless One. He worked purely in the political field unhampered by religious, social or humane consideration. He was free to adopt any or all methods, of deceits, duplicity and diplomacy. The Guru primarily a religious preceptor and reformer had closed all these avenues of help and relied entirely on his physical prowess, determination and devotion to his cause, to achieve his ends. The conquests of Shivaji attracted men to him with the lure of pelf and power. On the other hand the Guru gathered ordinary people, the so-called dregs of the Hindu society around him, filled them with love, courage, patriotism and brotherhood, in order to gain conquests for the cause of the people. *Shivaji attracted fighters to him, the Guru transformed ordinary people into selfless, redoubtable fighters for Hindu Dharma, the equal of the highest in the world. He transformed the ruined field into a verdant green blossoming and promising a rich crop of its fruit. The Hindus are forever beholden to Guru Gobind Singh and bow before him in grateful esteem.*