

Outstanding Qualities of the Guru

It shall be amiss on my part, if I fail to write about the qualities of the Guru that emerge from the happenings penned on the foregoing pages. I shall write only about these. Every Punjabi is conversant with these traits of the Guru, though no one so far has tried to capture them in writing. Mine is going to be the first exercise in this direction, if I falter here and there; I crave the reader's indulgence to bear with me. If I repeat myself or seem to be contradicting myself, it is entirely my fault, the fault of a novice in this field.

Guru Gobind Singh was a true anchorite and a true patriot. Krishna and Bhishma had sermonised in the *Mahabharata* that a man who gives up his life for the good of others is the greatest of all anchorites. The Guru not only gave up his life for the welfare of others but also gave up everything he had for the love of his country. He sacrificed his ease and comfort, his blood and body for his nation. He did not hesitate to sacrifice his all for his country and people. He may easily be called the greatest among those who gave up everything for their country. Giving up, entails first possessing a thing, and then giving it up for a noble cause for the general good. *Buddha detached himself from the world out of fear of pain and suffering. The detachment of Bhishma was inspired by the selfish motive of gaining the favour of his father.* The Guru gave up everything he had for his people, for his country. He sacrificed everything for the Hindus, for their welfare and for their Dharma, without any selfish motive or thought of return. Had he so desired he could have rolled snugly in the lap of luxury, could have demanded and enjoyed enormous esteem and respect, could have received paeans of praise as a revered Guru. He never hankered after such petty things.

It is extremely rare if not altogether impossible to find all the good qualities in one man. *But the Guru was an embodiment of all round perfection. He was a poet, a religious leader, a religious and social reformer, .an excellent planner and counsellor and a superb general.* He was a poet whose verse was forceful and vibrant with emotions of every kind, and highly eloquent. As a reformer in the social and religious spheres he had no peer. In the battle-field he was a dauntless general unperturbed by the turn of events. He was a sagacious (astute) and farsighted counsellor, a true lover of his country, an unflagging champion of his people, an unrivalled martyr of his country.

Krishna, Ram Chandra and Shankara were great men and in their time they performed

great deeds. Guru Gobind Singh surpassed them all in working wonders for the nation and the country. In the battlefield, Krishna exhorted martial princes to drive away any thoughts of cowardice out of their minds and prepare for the battle, while the Guru uplifted and filled with fervour and fighting spirit such people who had been turned into mere clods of clay during many centuries of oppression, and who had never dreamed of holding weapons. Inspired by the Guru they performed such deeds of exceptional valour as put into shade the exploits of Arjuna in the battlefield. And with a tiny band of these men the Guru having no worldly possessions, confronted the innumerable Imperial hordes with vast resources at their disposal.

He was very steadfast. He stuck to the last to the mission of his life, which he had conceived during the life time of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur. Every moment of his life, he kept his mission before him. He continuously worked for its success. No grief, no hardship, and no adversity in short nothing could or did take his mind away from his mission. He did not waver in his resolve at the death of his sons and his near and dear ones.

Nothing could lower his courage. No defeat could dishearten, no distress could depress him and no predicament could make him despondent. A little respite after a rout, made him gather his men and prepare for another showdown in the battlefield with a redoubtable enemy with the vast resources of an equally vast empire at his back. He fought successfully against armies made up of professional soldiers. With bands of ill-equipped men from the lower rungs of society — essentially non combatants — having little or no training in war-fare, he fought successfully against armies made up of professional soldiers. No situation was hopeless for him. Visualize the valiant stand taken by the Guru and his forty Sikhs against the Imperial hordes at Chamkaur. The entire History of the world cannot offer its peer.

He was an excellent fighter himself, equally skilled in the handling of the sword, the bow, the spear and other weapons. He always fought in the forefront to inspire his Sikhs with feats of personal valour, and to bolster their courage. His sword used to spread consternation in the ranks of Imperial army and his arrows always dented the enemy attack. He was not only an excellent fighter, but was also a superb general. He knew how to marshall his men and get the best out of them. Many a time he defeated the combined armies of the Subedars and the Hill Rajas with a small force. His presence was electrifying for his men. He always went where his presence was

needed most. He inspired his men to perform deeds of unique valour, to die fighting against impossible odds, to beat back numerically superior forces. Excellent generals had not been great fighters. But the Guru possessed both these qualities in the highest degree.

He was very hardy and industrious. Whenever he found leisure, he used to train his men. He bore all kinds of hardships, braving the thorny paths barefooted in the dark night, sleeping on clods of earth, breasting the raging torrents, going without food and rest, with perfect equanimity. He would often thank his Lord Akal for such harsh blessings. He never felt dismayed by any adversity. He could send his sons to fight and see them die fighting before his very eyes without wincing. He could hear calmly the news of the horrible deaths of his remaining two children of the tender ages of seven and nine years. No word or action of his ever displayed despondency.

The Guru was never in a haste to do anything. He would always ponder over all aspects of an issue before going in for any action. The laying of the firm foundation of the Khalsa is a wonderful example of his superb circumspection. So firm was the foundation of the edifice of the Khalsa, that the Imperial swords and guns, the Imperial power and glory could not check its growth. Every man who became a Sikh of the Guru, was infused with such mettle that he thought nothing of battling with death, of sacrificing his life for his faith and the *good of others*; *Guru Gobind Singh turned cowards into courageous men, traders into tough fighters and the down-trodden into doughty warriors.* His men were not only great warriors in the battlefield, but were also men of integrity, humane, gentle, full of love for all, God-loving, open and truthful. He inculcated the noble qualities of selfless service and self-sacrifice in his people. He was the first man to think of nationalism and to foster feeling of nationalism among the Indian people.

He was not only highly circumspect but was far-sighted as well. He planned not only for the present but also for the time to come. With his far-sight he knit the Khalsa into such a strong union, gave it such principles as would forestall any degeneration or decline. His abolition of the Gurudom was a very sagacious, timely and far-sighted step. It has verily saved the Khalsa from losing its purity and character. He was a good administrator and personally looked after everything. He managed his resources skillfully and kept a small army at no great expense. He looked after the well-being of every one of his men.

There was a magic in his words that carried away his Sikhs. They would gladly do anything for him so much that they would not hesitate to sacrifice their lives at his behest. Guru Gobind Singh loved his Sikhs equally well without any distinction of high or low and they were aware of this. *The Guru endeared himself to all with his sweet manners, soft words and warm heart. He was a great lover of mankind and a firm believer in the brotherhood of man.* That is why despite being a relentless enemy of the cruel and despotic Muslim rulers he was loved and honoured by the ordinary Muslims. The carrying of the Guru on a cot raised high by two Muslims, to a place of safety when the Imperial army was looking for him, bears this out amply. He was very courteous and generous. His *Langar* (kitchen) was always open to any hungry person. His house was always open to the needy. He and his services were always there for the taking by any oppressed person. Though the Hill Rajas were dead set against him and left no occasion to fight against him, but the Guru readily responded to their supplication and helped them when they were in sore distress.

He had a jovial nature and loved to play practical jokes on others. We all know how he alongwith his fellows broke the pitchers of ladies, in his childhood at Patna. He had a fine sense of humour, subtle as well as robust. Once one of his devotee Sikhs killed a tiger, brought its whole skin alongwith its head face ears etc. intact and presented it to him. The Guru asked his Sikh to put the skin along with the head etc. onto a donkey. They did a nice job of it and the donkey came to resemble a tiger. The Guru asked the Sikhs to set the donkey loose, out on the streets. The people taking it for a real tiger were seized with panic and ran for their lives. Some hid themselves while some others climbed trees and house-tops. People locked their doors. At last the donkey brayed and the people heaved a sigh of relief.

He was not only a patron of arts but also a man of letters himself. He was fond of reading and especially loved to go through historical books especially those dealing with the exploits of the Indian heroes. He liked such books to be read to him. He was quite proficient in Arabic and Persian and also knew Sanskrit well. He used to hear with great interest readings from the old Scriptures, The Shastras, Upanishdas and Puranas, etc. He was a great poet and kept a coterie of 52 poets at his court. He had a great love for war epics, encouraged his poets to compose verses on martial themes and himself composed epics celebrating the exploits of the goddess Durga of Hindu Mythology in stirring verse that arouses martial feelings in the readers.

He devoted some time daily, both in the morning and the evening, to the worship of Akal the Formless One, and to the singing of *Shabads* (hymns) from Gurbani. Recitations from the Holy Granth, the Guru Granth Sahib, were made every-day and the Guru always attended these recitations in the holy congregation. He personally recited Japji Sahib, Jaap Sahib, Swayyas, Chaupai and Rehras everyday. He was very regular and devout in saying his prayers and performing his religious duties. He thoroughly despised idol-worship and the observance of *Sharadhs* (obsequies for the well-being of the dead ancestors).

Guru Gobind Singh was a votary of Truth. He never lost sight of Truth in any of his teachings and actions. He did nothing untruthful either in the battlefield or in his daily works. *He was often requested by people to perform miraculous deeds. His reply ever was that man is a powerless being, all miracle-making lies with the Lord. Once at Agra he was asked about the existence of miracles.* He answered that man cannot perform miracles but three things in the world are miracles in themselves; steel, strength and wealth. **Steel** (the Guru meant weapons) can grant crowns, fulfil a man's desires, help him gain honour and liberation through a heroic death in the battle-field. **Power** (physical and intellectual) helps one gain dominance in any sphere. The powerless are pushed to the wall, humbled and humiliated. They are the slaves of the powerful people. **Wealth** wins over everybody. A poor man has no friends, no relatives. Wealth enables a man to attain honour and respect and fulfil his desires.

The Guru was very simple in manners and dealings. He loved everyone irrespective of caste, creed, social status or any other man-made distinction. His concept of love was all-embracing, the concept of Universal Brotherhood which cut-across all barriers of caste, colour, creed, clan and country. He received everyone, including those who considered themselves his enemies openly, with a smiling face. He was a man without any shortcoming, above praise and averse to denigration of others. Generous to a fault, he helped even the Hill Rajas who were ever eager and did their level best to trouble him. Bahadur Shah, the Emperor of India wanted to grant him a *Jagir*, but the Guru declined the offer. He was never swayed by desire in his chequered career. He was a true champion of the downtrodden and oppressed Hindus.