

The Shift of Paradigm in Sikhism

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Abstract

Seventeenth century marked a drastic change in Sikhism. After the death of Guru ArjunDev, there was no change in religious ideology of the Gurus till Guru TegBahadur. The Gurus had a numerous followers outside Punjab and the Gurus were dependant on the Masands. Also in the seventeenth century many rival claimants like Prithi Chand and Dhirmal laid their claim as Gurus and had their followers. Guru Gobind Singh in the end of seventeenth century marked major changes when he created Khalsa when difference between. The term Khalsa was given to the Sikhs who were introduced to the Sikhism by the Gurus themselves and not by the Masands and the rival claimants. In fact, the Khalsas were instructed to not to have any connection with the Masands and their followers which was indeed a major change as the earlier Gurus were dependant on Masands for collection of the offerings. Unlike earlier Gurus, Guru Gobind Singh obviated external interference with the use of physical force. Sikh followers at the time of earlier Gurus did not have a distinguished appearance but Guru Gobind Singh made a Khalsa distinguished from rest of the world. After Guru Ram Dass the Guruship was confined to one family only. Personal Guruship was abandoned by Guru Gobind Singh nominating Guru GranthShahib as the next and the last Guru crystallizing into the twin doctrine of Guru Panth and Guru Granth. Guru Gobind Singh divided Sikhism into two components and the Singhs represented the 'transformed' component.

Keywords: -Sikh, Guru, Guruship, Akal-Takht, Masand, Khalsa, Panth, Mughal, Hukamnama, Sangat, Bani.

Contents:-

Seventeenth Century marked a remarkable importance in the history of Sikhs. After the martyrdom of the fifth Guru ArjunDev, five Gurus succeeded him. Guru Hargobind (Son of Guru ArjunDev), Guru HarRai (Son of Guru HarGobind), Guru HarKrishan (Son of Guru HarRai), Guru TegBahadur (grand uncle of Guru HarKrishan and youngest son of Guru ArjunDev) succeeded Guru ArjunDev in that order. Guru Gobind Singh in 1708¹ before his death abolished the personal Guruship.

Emperor Jahangir had heard about the earlier four Gurus before Guru ArjunDev during his prince-hood and considered the doctrine as a "shop" which had done business of selling "Falsehood" to ignorant Muslims

and foolish Hindus². In order to counter this he ordered Guru ArjunDev to be put to death and ordered to confiscate his property³.

In reaction to the event of martyrdom of Guru ArjunDev, Guru Hargobind (sixth guru) girded two swords, one symbolizing his spiritual authority and one his temporal power and encouraged his followers in martial activity. Akal Takht “The immortal Stone” was constructed at Harmandir where Guru Hargobind held a kind of court to conduct his temporal business. A fort “Lohgarh” was also constructed for defence. This was not similar to the practices of his predecessors and the activities resulted into Jahangir ordering his detention into fort of Gwalior. Counter representations were made from the side of Guru Hargobind and he was released. The emperor felt satisfied with the justifications given by the Guru for his practices used and he was left free to pursue his practices for the rest of Jahangir’s reign⁴.

Rival claimants popularly known as “minas” did not appreciate the measures taken by the Guru. After the death of Guru ArjunDev, his elder brother Prithichand had put forth his claim to be next guru. After Prithi Chand his son “Miharban” claimed to be the seventh Guru. Some sikhs influenced by the agenda of the “minas” alleged the Guru of not staying at one place; sending into imprisonment by the emperor; roaming the land without fear; keeping dogs and going for hunting; not composing the Bani and giving preference to the scoundrel over the devoted servants. However BhaiGurdas asserted that Guru Hargobind was having an unbearable burden and true Sikhs were devoted to him⁵. He justified the Guru with the argument that an orchard needs the protective hedge of hardy and thorny keekar trees⁶. BhaiGurdas projects him as a legitimate successor of Guru Nanak and condemns the slanderers in general and the minas in loud and clear terms.

His hunting interest brought him into conflict with the Mughal administrators of the province of Lahore under the reign of emperor Shahjahan. A Mughal commandant attacked Ramdaspur but it was repulsed. As a consequence the Guru abandoned Ramdaspur and went to Kartarpur. He was attacked there too but the Guru was victorious⁷. He decided to leave the province of Kartarpur and went to Kiratpur, a small principality of Hindur (Nalagarh) where he died in the first week of march 1644 after living for 8 or 9 years in Kiratpur.

There was no change in the religious ideology of Guru Hargobind⁸. He had numerous followers in Ujjain, Burhanpur, Lucknow, Prayag, Jaunpur, Patna, Rajmahal, and Dacco and most of them were Khatri like in Punjab⁹. Agriculture was one of the two most important professions of the Sikhs and there were many jats among his important “Masands”. The Guru’s dependence on the “Masand” had increased and some of them had started appointing their own deputies or agents for collection of offerings. The offerings were brought the Guru on Baisakhi.

In the absence of Guru Hargobind, Ramdaspur was taken over by “Miharben”. He was later succeeded by

his son Harji. Guru Hargobind's grandson Dhirmal moved to Kartarpur in early 1640¹⁰ and abandoned the anti establishment stance. He was given revenue free land by the emperor Shah Jahan¹¹.

The sixth Guru before his death appointed Guru Har Rai as the seventh Guru of the Sikhs. In order to not to embroil himself in armed conflict, he moved to Thapal in the territory of Sirmur (Nahan)¹². On the rumoured support of Guru Har Rai to Dara Shikoh during his flight to Punjab, Guru Har Rai was summoned by emperor Aurangzeb to his court. Ram Rai (older son of Guru Har Rai) was sent and he was made hostage by Aurangzeb. Guru Har Krishan was appointed as the next Guru and he was also summoned to Delhi by Aurangzeb. Ram Rai got patronage of Aurangzeb and received revenue free land from Aurangzeb in Dehradun. Guru Har Krishan dies of small pox in Delhi 1664. Before death Guru Har Krishan indicated Guru Teg Bahadur (his grand uncle) to be next and ninth Guru of the Sikhs.

Guru Teg Bahadur left Kiratpur after death of Guru Har Krishan and settled in Bakala in Bari Doab, the parental village of her mother. However the opposition from Dhirmal and Harji obliged him to leave the Bari Doab and go to Kiratpur. He chose Makhawal, a few kilometres away from Kiratpur as his new centre. In 1665 the Guru left Makhawal to make a contact with some of the Sikh Sangat in the Mughal provinces of the Gangetic plains where he was detained by Alam Khan Rohilla. He was set free in December on the intercession of Kanwar Ram Singh. The Guru went to many places including Agra, Benares, Prayag, Sasharam and Patna. He left his family at Patna to be looked after by some locals before moving to Mohangir. His first son was born there. From Mohangir he moved to Dacca where he was joined by Raja Ram Singh who accompanied him in the expeditions of Assam. In March 1670 he moved back towards Punjab. In the first five or six years of pontificate Guru Teg Bahadur travelled more than any of his predecessors after Guru Nanak Dev. It is evident from the "Hukumnamas" (the extant letters) that the Sangat in Patna and Benares served him in veneration.

When Aurangzeb got to know that the Sikhs had built temples in every town and popular places and the agents of the Guru collected offerings in multitude, he ordered the deputies to be thrown out of temples¹³. Aurangzeb issued a general order in 1669 that all the schools and temples of non Muslims should be demolished. In Buriatown of Sirhind Sarkar a temple was demolished by the local administrators and mosque was built on it. The Sikhs in turn demolished the mosque. This incident reveals the tension created by imperial orders.

The compositions of Guru Teg Bahadur revealed him as a prophet of reassurance in a trying situation¹⁴. To impart this idea of reassurance to the peasants and Zamindars of Delhi, he moved out of Makhawal in 1673. He moved village to village in the states of Punjab and Haryana and received a good response of this missionary work. The report of this response was likely to be sent to the emperor Aurangzeb by the news writers. In May 1675 a deputation of Brahmans from Kashmir met with Guru Teg Bahadur with a woeful

tale of religious persecution by Mughal Governor. In July 1675 he appointed his son Gobind Das as the next Guru and moved out of Makhawal. In the Pargana of Ropar he was arrested by Mughal authorities and kept in prison for 4 months in the Sarkar of Sirhind. He was taken to Delhi in November 1675 where he was asked to perform miracle as a proof of his nearness to God. The Guru refuted the idea that occult powers were proof of his nearness to God¹⁵. He was asked to embrace Islam and three of his companions were put to death in his presence to show him the consequence of a refusal. Guru TegBahadur refused to accept Islam and he was beheaded in the Chandnichowk of Delhi on 11 November 1675. Guru TegBahadr's unique sacrifice in the cause not only of his own faith but also in the cause of freedom of conscience in general was admired by his son and successor. The world went mourning at his departure¹⁶ and there was a deep sorrow, which is evident from an example that a Sikh in Agra in October 1676 threw two bricks at Aurangzeb when he was returning from Jami Masjid.

The first decade of Guru Gobind Singh's pontificate was uneventful. He received religious education and training in the use of arms. He inspired his young companions and followers to take interest in the martial activity. The Sikhs visited Makhawal in large numbers at the time of Baisakhi and Diwali, which gave an appearance of an armed camp. The young chief of Kahlur(Bilaspur) treated it as a threat to the integrity of his territories and insisted on a formal acknowledgement by Guru Gobind Singh that he was subject to the authority of the chief. The situation became more tense when chief of Sirmur(Nahan) invited Guru Gobind Singh to his principality.

Guru Gobind Singh accepted the offer and settled down at Paunta, which was on the border of Sirmur, adjoining territory of Garhwal. There was a dispute between chief of Sirmur and Chief of Garhwal over the border territories. Guru Gobind Singh raised a Fort in Paunta and raised an efficient fighting force. In 1688 the Chief of Garhwal invaded the territory of Sirmur with a number of hill chiefs as his allies and with some mercenary commanders. Guru Gobind Singh moved out of Paunta and fought them with them at Bhangani. Guru Gobind Singh lost his cousin Sango Shah in the battle but emerged victorious. Guru Gobind Singh had good resources in men, in bows and arrows, javelin, swords, maces and horses. He had no intention of embroiling himself any further in the affairs of his chief so he left Paunta and returned Makhawal in 1689 to found Anandpur in its vicinity. The new township was built with better defences and men who had fought at Bhangani were allowed to reside in Anandpur.

A few years later Bhim Chand, chief of Kahlur sought his help against Mughal Faujdars of the hills. Mughal Faujdar of Jammu had sent an force against Bhim Chand and other hill chiefs who had refused to pay tribute. Guru Gobind Singh participated in the battle at Nadaun, which ended in Bhim Chand's victory. Towards the end of 1693, the news writer of Sirhind reported of the gathering crowds in Anandpur. Aurangzeb was now in Deccan and he ordered the Faujdars to ensure that there are no crowds. A Mughal

force was sent to Anandpur with an intention to attack at night. Guru Gobind Singh was awakened by his guards in time to prepare the defence. The Mughal commander left Anandpur without a fight. Another expedition was sent against the Guru but by then some of the hill chiefs had become rebellious. The Mughal commander was defeated and killed by the rebel chiefs. A small contingent sent by Guru Gobind Singh was supporting the rebel chiefs. The leader of this contingent died fighting with seven of his horsemen. Another Mughal force was sent under Rajput commandant Jujhar Singh but he too was defeated. When Aurangzeb sent his son to Punjab in 1696, he chastised the rebel chiefs but Guru Gobind Singh remained safe at Anandpur¹⁷.

During all these years Guru Gobind Singh was in contact with the Sikh Sangats in the country. The Sangats of the east (Dacca, Chittagong, Sondeep and sylhet) were asked to send offerings through Hukumnamas. The Sikhs were asked to come personally at the time of Baisakhi and Diwali. It is interesting to find that bulk of Hukumnamas are addressed to Sangat outside punjaba and to the sangats on the east of Satlej¹⁸ which is indeed a shift in constituency of the successors of Guru ArjanDev and was partly a result of dissent within Sikhism. The successors of Guru Nanak Dev had experienced opposition from the rival claimants from the very beginning. After Guru Hargobind left Ramdaspur the rival claimants became more affective. The successors of Prithi Chand composed Janamsakhi to promote their own sectarian purpose. The udasis tried to minimize importance of all the successors of Guru Nanak and the followers of Hindal tried to undermine the position of Guru Nanak Dev himself.

Faced with threat from outside and dissension within the Sikh Panth, Guru Gobind Singh thought long and deeply about his position as the successor of Guru Nanak. He subscribed to the idea of the unity of Guruship from Guru Nanak to Guru TegBahadur, he believed in one God, the creator, the sustainer and the destroyer of the universe. Guru Gobind Singh believed that he too was chosen instrument of God and this providential role he was to fulfil in his way as the successor of Guru Nanak. His problem was to defend the claims of conscience against external interference for which Guru TegBahadur had given one answer. Guru Gobind Singh proposed to give another. His aim was to obviate external interference with the use of physical force and for this purpose he had to set his own house in order i.e the Panth founded by Guru Nanak. On the Baisakhi of 1699 at the time of large gathering at Anandpur, Guru Gobind Singh proclaimed that henceforth all the Sikhs would be his Khalsa. The term Khalsa by that time was used by that time for the Sikhs initiated into Sikh faith by the Gurus themselves and not by the Masands. This proclamation removed the mediacy of the Masands and also meant that the followers of the dissidents were not to be treated as true Sikhs. The Khalsas were instructed not to have any connection with the Masands and their followers. The Khalsas were also instructed to not to have any connection with the followers of Ram Rai, Dhir Mal and Prithi Chand¹⁹. This was the chastening baptism of the double edged sword which obliged the

initiate to keep hair unshorn to wear arms and to bear the epithet 'Singh' with their names. Any five Singhs could initiate others to the new order. The principle of unity and equality was re-introduced in the Sikh Panth. The principle also introduced an element of internal tussle between those who accepted the new order and those who did not and also the socio-religious identity of the Sikhs stood more distinctly pronounced than that of earlier Sikhs. Indeed as a contemporary writer says, the Khalsa stood distinguished from the rest of the world²⁰. The KhalsaSangats now represented the Guru. Guru Gobind Singh declared the Khalsa to be heir of everything he possessed, because he himself owed everything to himself.

The increasing number of armed Singhs at Anandpur particularly at the times of Baisakhi and Diwali posed a great threat to the hill chiefs. No single chief was able to confront them. Bhim Chand formed an alliance with hill chiefs. Difficult to dislodge with the Guru they seemed help of Mughal Faujdars. They induced the Guru to cross Satlejriver into the territory of a friendly chief but Bhim Chand attacked the Guru and suffered defeat. The victory of Guru Gobind Singh resulted into more and more Singhs into Anandpur. As it created shortage of supply they started plundering nearby villages. Feeling helpless the chiefs approached Aurangjeb for protection as his vassals. The Imperial and vassal forces were mobilized and siege was laid to Anandpur. A long blockade and safe conduct promise made the Singhs to agree to evacuate the fortress. Guru Gobind Singh left the fortress towards the end of 1704. While crossing a floodstream in Ropar he was attacked by Mughal troops and his wife, his mother and sons were separated in the melee. He crossed the stream and stopped at Chamkaur. All his followers and two eldest sons died fighting at Chamkaur. His wife Mata Sundri was escorted to Delhi by a devoted follower, but his mother, Mata Gujri and the two youngest sons fell into the hands of Wazir Khan, the Mughal Faujdar of Sarhind. He put the young boys to death. Guru Gobind Singh contacted the Khalsas present in Faridkot and Bhatinda and repulsed an attack from Wazir Khan at Khidrana. Aurangjeb came to know about these establishments in the Punjab and thought of conciliating Guru Gobind Singh. When the Guru wrote a spirited letter (Zafarnama) in response, justifying his position on moral grounds, Aurangjeb sent special messengers with orders for Governor of Punjab to conciliate the Guru at all costs and persuade to meet the emperor personally in Deccan²¹. Guru Gobind Singh refused the help of Governor of Lahore but decided to meet Aurangjeb. On his way to Deccan he was in Rajasthan when he heard of the news of emperor's death. Aurangjeb had died in February 1707.

Guru Gobind Singh met the new emperor Bahadur Shah at Agra where he was well received and encouraged to hope that he would get Anandpur back. Bahadur Shah went to Rajasthan and then to the Deccan to fight for the throne with his brother. Guru Gobind Singh remained near the empirical camp for nearly a year. When the camp halted at Nanded (Maharashtra), Guru Gobind Singh decided to stay behind where he was stabbed and badly wounded by an Afghan. Guru Gobind Singh died on October 7, 1708.

Guru Gobind Singh did not nominate anyone as his successor. Guruship had been impersonalised, bringing the Bani and Sangat into parallel prominence with the personal Guru. The Decision taken by Guru Gobind Singh did not abolish Guruship itself but personal Guruship. All the Sikhs at the time of Guru Gobind Singh's death were not his Khalsa and his Khalsa were not Singhs. The difference between the Singh and the Khalsa ended with his death and two terms became interchangeable. The difference between Sikh and Singh remained. In the entire body of the followers of the Gurus, divided into two distinct components, the Singhs represented the 'transformed' component.



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