

## THE CONCEPT OF GURU

Guru is a pivotal concept in Sikhism. It is basic to the pursuit and understanding of the religion. It is a very complex concept too.

In Sikhism the term Guru is used reverentially for a person much more elevated than an ordinary teacher who is also referred to as guru in common parlance in India. It represents a person much above a model human being or a "guide, friend and philosopher" and somewhat beyond a saint or devotee. Only a God-realized Master can be a Guru in Sikhism.

The concept of a Guru is not the same as that of a prophet in Islam as a person who is believed to be chosen by the God to say things that He himself wants to say to the people. The Guru is also not an incarnation of God as in Hinduism who comes down to earth in some form. In Bhagavad Gita it is written: "When there is a decay of *dharmā* (righteousness) and outbreak of *adharma* (non-righteousness) I descend Myself to protect the good, to annihilate the wicked and to re-establish *dharmā*- I am born from age to age." The Guru in Sikhism is perceived as a link and an Intermediary between the God and His creation. He is invested with the duty of showing the true spiritual path to the people.

The spirit of God resides in all human beings. It is in the Guru that the divine spirit finds its expression. In ordinary human beings it is not visible because of their egotism. The egotism is due to *māyā* (illusion) which keeps them ignorant of the light within. They need the guidance of the Guru to rid themselves of *māyā* "Without the Guru, neither devotion nor love for God wells within us. Nor are we ushered into the company of saints. Without the Guru one is blind and is involved in strife. Yes, through the Guru is the mind purged; through the Guru's word is one's mind cleansed. It is by meeting with the Guru that one conquers oneself; and one revels in the *yoga* of God's devotion. Associating with the Guru, one is rid of all one's maladies. In this way one is blessed with the Yoga of equipoise." (CGS Basant, Mahalla I) "The True Guru is the boatman and the Word the oars to ferry one to the other shore where there is neither wind, nor fire, nor water, nor form and where abides our True Lord dispensing the True Name. Those who were led by the Guru reached the other shore attuned to the True One. And they overcame their coming and going, their soul merged with

the oversoul. Yes, through the Guru's wisdom poise wells up in one who merges in the Truth." (GGs Maru, Mahalla I).

At present the Divine Spirit and the Guiding Force is enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib which is the eternal Guru. This was preceded by ten living Gurus who are all believed to have the same light.

### 1. GURU NANAK DEV

Guru Nanak Dev, the first Guru of the Sikhs and the founder of Sikhism, was born in 1469 CE in a Hindu family of Talwandi, a village about 65 Km from Lahore in Pakistan. It is now called Nankana Sahib and is an important place of pilgrimage for the Sikhs. Unlike Mahavira and Buddha, Guru Nanak Dev was not born to affluent parents. His father Kalu was the village *patwari* at the lowest rung of the revenue hierarchy but he led a clean life and was honest and God-fearing. He belonged to the Bedi sub-caste.

The Sikhs believe that Guru Nanak's birth was "non-Karmic" i.e. he was born not according to the laws of *karma* but in response to the God's will as someone already in a state of enlightenment. Even as a child he was looking for deeper meaning in everything. He questioned old traditions, customs and religious rites. As the Guru grew up he was asked to take the cattle for grazing in the village pasture. He was not interested in worldly affairs and would spend his solitude for inward communion. He did not take much interest in business either.

Ultimately, at the age of fifteen, Guru Nanak Dev was sent to his sister Nanaki at Sultanpur Lodhi near Kapurthala. There he took up a job as a storekeeper with the governor Daulat Khan Lodhi. He was married and had two children.

While at Sultanpur Lodhi, once he went missing after taking his customary morning bath in the nearby river *Bein*. Three days later he returned and proclaimed: "There is no Hindu; there is no Muslim." Indeed the Guru was ready to preach the message of universal brotherhood. So he left Sultanpur Lodhi in AD 1497 with his constant companion Mardana on his first missionary travel. This was followed later on by a few more such journeys to far off places. He covered most of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and also went to Sri Lanka, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan.

Around AD 1521 Guru Nanak Dev settled at Kartarpur (Pakistan) on the river Ravi. There he established what is regarded as the ideal Sikh community. He demonstrated the practice of Sikhism and became very popular. Before he passed away in AD 1539, Sikhism had taken firm roots. A new religion had been born with a distinct theology and ethics. Nine hundred and forty seven (947) of Guru Nanak Dev's hymns in 19 Ragas (personification) are included in the *Adi Granth*.

## 2. GURU ANGAD DEV

The installation of Guru Angad Dev as a successor to Guru Nanak Dev is of profound significance in Sikh history. Guru Nanak Dev chose him in preference to his two sons demonstrating the recognition by him to the fact that the community needed a competent leader if it was to take firm roots.

Guru Angad Dev was born in March 1504 in Faridkot district. His original name was Lehna which was changed to Angad (meaning "my limb") by Guru Nanak Dev to indicate his successors status. After the death of his father, Pheru Mal, who was a learned and respectable man, Guru Angad Dev moved to Khadur Sahib and set up a shop there. He met Guru Nanak Dev at Kartarpur (Pakistan) in AD 1532 and immediately became his disciple. After becoming the second Guru, he shifted his headquarters to Khadur Sahib.

He was a spiritual leader who was also practical in his approach. He took care of the physical and mental health of his followers. He encouraged the Sikhs to take interest in sports and also to send their children to the primary schools where they were imparted education. More importantly, he introduced a simplified Gurmukhi script for Punjabi. He got a number of copies of Guru Nanak Dev's sermons made out in the Gurmukht script, which he codified into thirty five letters culled from various scripts prevalent at the time. The Guru has contributed 62 hymns to the *Adi Granth*. He passed away in AD 1552 at Khadur Sahib. His period as the Guru was one of consolidation of the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev.

## 3. GURU AMAR DAS

Guru Amar Das, the third Guru of the Sikhs, was born in May 1479. Although a contemporary of Guru Nanak Dev he never met him. He

was the elder brother of the father-in-law of Bibi Amro, daughter of Guru Angad Dev. Through her he met Guru Angad Dev at Khadur Sahib in AD 1540 and became his disciple at the age of 61. He served Guru Angad Dev with such dedication that he was installed as the third Guru in AD 1552.

Guru Amar Das made Goindwal his center which soon grew into a flourishing town. With a view to providing the Sikhs a place where they could have a holy dip in place of visiting Hardwar and Varanasi, the Guru decided to have a well or pool dug in Goindwal. This is a sort of open water reservoir with wide steps approaching the surface of water. In view of his age, the Guru did not do much travelling excepting a brief visit to Hardwar and other Hindu pilgrim centers but he visualized the setting up of a premier Sikh centre with a holy pool at Amritsar (non-existent at that time). A beginning towards this was made in his life time, though the main project was left to his successor Guru Ram Das to complete.

Considering that it was at the ripe old age of seventy-three that Guru Amar Das had become the Guru, he has considerable achievements to his credit. By this time the Sikhs had already emerged as a distinctive community. He organized the community into twenty-two geographical divisions and also appointed women to undertake preaching work. To strengthen the cohesion of the community further, he introduced the custom of summoning the Sikhs to assemble in his presence at the festivals of Baisakhi and Diwali. He added a new dimension to the concept of *langar* by insisting upon visitors to Goindwal to partake in *langar* before having audience with him; "*Pahele pangat; Peechhe sangat.*"

Like Guru Angad Dev, Guru Amar Das had more copies of Guru Nanak Dev's and Guru Angad Dev's sermons made, to which he added his own for use at various occasions. Eight hundred and sixty nine hymns of the Guru are included in the *Adi Granth*.

The growing political importance of the Guru may be judged from his successful intervention with Emperor Akbar to secure the repeal of the tax on pilgrims going to Hardwar, and a meeting he had with the emperor.

During Guru Amar Das' pontificate the Sikh community moved a step further towards consolidation. The Guru passed away in

September 1574 at the age of ninety-five but before that he had designated his son-in-law, Guru Ram Das as his successor.

#### 4. GURU RAM DAS

Guru Ram Das was born in September 1534 at Lahore to a simple and God-fearing couple, Hari Das and Daya Daur. Being the eldest child he was called Jetha. He lost both of his parents at the age of seven. Consequently his maternal grand-mother brought him to Baserke, the ancestral village of Guru Amar Das where Guru Ram Das spent about 10 years. Jathas were going to Goindwal from Baserke to help in the construction work being supervised by Guru Amar Das just before his being installed as the third Guru. At Goindwal, he impressed Guru Amar Das so much that he was selected as the most suitable match for Bibi Bhani, the religious minded daughter of the third Guru. In AD 1574 he was installed as the fourth Guru of the Sikhs.

The most outstanding contribution of Guru Ram Das is the foundation of the city of Amritsar as a gift from Akbar to Bibi Bhani. The project had already been planned by Guru Amar Das. The Guru made Amritsar the focal point for Baisakhi and Diwali gatherings of the Sikhs which practice is continuing up to the present time. Over time Amritsar has become the holiest city of the Sikhs besides becoming a great religious and commercial center. During its construction the Guru sent deputies to different parts of north India with a view to collecting donations as also to put missionary work on a sound footing.

Guru Ram Das was a talented musicologist. He could use thirty ragas (scale). Six hundred and seventy-nine (679) of his compositions are included in the Adi Granth including the famous wedding hymns Lawan used at Sikh marriage ceremonies. He passed away in AD 1581.

#### 5. GURU ARJAN DEV

Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, is first Guru to have been born a Sikh. He was the youngest son of Guru Ram Das. He was born in April 1563 at Goindwal where he spent the first eleven years of his life. After that he moved with his father to Amritsar which was under construction in those days. He helped his father in

the supervision of the construction work. As such, Guru Arjan Dev was deeply involved in the early development of Amritsar. The excavation of the holy pool which had been started by Guru Ram Das was completed by him. He also conceived the holiest shrine of the Sikhs-the Golden Temple-and got its foundation stone laid in AD 1597 by the well known Muslim saint Mian Mir. It was completed in AD 1601.

Guru Arjan Dev was a farsighted charismatic religious leader. After building the Golden Temple, he thought of compiling the holiest book for the Sikhs. Spurious versions of the hymns of Guru Nanak Dev and his successors were circulating. But as the community was spreading geographically there was a need for an authentic collection to be made available. He achieved this with the help of Bhai Gurdas. To the writings of the first four Gurus he added 2312 of his own verses as also the important writings of well known devotee and Sufi saints. He also prescribed a complete musical system for the organization of verses. The verses of Guru Man Dev have continued to be popular with Sikh musicians generation after generation. He wrote in a simple, conversational language. His magnum opus, the *SUKHMANI*, the Psalm, is a long poem ranking next only to the poem of Guru Nanak Dev in popularity with the devout.

In forty-three years of his life Guru Arjan Dev made a real monumental contribution to the development and consolidation of Sikhism. Besides the unifying institutions mentioned earlier, he founded cities. In AD 1590 the pool at Taran Tarn was constructed. In AD 1594 he founded the town of Kartarpur (Jalandhar).

To a student of Guru Arjan Dev's life, his martyrdom was an inevitability. The forces of evil and hatred led to it. Relations with the imperial court during the last years of Akbar's reign were cordial and Sikh aspirations were high. But Jahangir who succeeded Akbar in AD 1605 adopted a different policy. After just seven months he ordered that the Guru be arrested and put to death according to the Muslim law after confiscating his property. Accordingly, Guru Arjan Dev was tortured to death in Lahore in March 1606. This became the first martyrdom in Sikhism.

## 6. GURU HARGOBIND

The martyrdom of Guru Alan Dev proved to be a turning point in Sikh history. His only son Guru Hargobind who was born at village Wadali in June 1595 was just eleven years old at that time. He had received his religious education from Baba Buddha and was fully equipped to provide leadership to the emerging Sikh community at a very delicate and difficult time.

Guru Hargobind responded to the situation by adding a new dimension to Sikhism. The Guru exhorted the Sikhs to prepare for difficult days ahead by undergoing physical training through wrestling, riding and Sikh martial art and to learn the use of weapons and other martial arts. A new philosophy: "If you will challenge death, death will run away from you" was taking shape. A touch of soldierliness was added to saintliness which was to assume the form of the concept of saint-soldier during the times of Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru emphasized the complementary nature of *meeri* (temporal power) and *peeri* (spiritual power). To demonstrate it the Guru started wearing two swords: one for *meeri* and the other for *peeri*. As a further step, he laid the foundation stone of the Akal Takhat as the highest seat of temporal authority of the Sikh community opposite the Golden Temple which was the highest spiritual center. The Guru started dispensing justice from the Akal Takhat, a practice which has continued up to the present times.

Threatened by the increasing and improved organization of the Sikhs, Emperor Jahangir got the Guru put in prison in Gwalior Fort. But this only enhanced his reputation and he was released after about two years (twelve years according to some historians). When Shahjahan became the Emperor in AD 1628, he intensified the oppression of the Sikhs. As a result the Guru had to fight four battles against the Mughal forces. The first official use of military force by the Sikhs probably belongs to this period. Guru Hargobind represents a slight break from the *sant* tradition of the earlier Gurus. They used to compose and sing verses; Guru Hargobind did not do so.

Guru Hargobind built *gurdwaras* at places associated with his predecessors and re-paired others. It appears that the name *gurdwara* was first used for a Sikh place of worship during the life

time of Guru Hargobind. Earlier- the name dhann sala which still persists in villages was used. The Guru founded Kiratpur in the Himalayan foot-hills and spent the last few years of his life there. He died there in March 1644.

The Guru had five sons, Gurditta, Suraj Mal, Ani Rai, Atal Rai and (Guru) Tegh Bahadur and one daughter Biro. Atal Rai had died at a very young age. The eldest son Gurditta had died in AD 1638 leaving two sons Dhirmal and Har Rai. Guru Hargobind chose the younger son of Gurditta, Har Rai to succeed him. This made the elder son of Gurditta, Dhirmal very jealous and angry making him to conspire with the Mughal court against the Sikh Gurus.

## 7. GURU HAR RAI

Guru Har Rai was the grandson of Guru Hargobind, being the younger son of Baba Gurditta. He was born at Kiratpur in January 1630. Baba Gurditta had died in AD 1638. So Guru Har Rai grew up under the personal supervision of his grandfather who nominated him as his successor in AD 1644.

Although he continued to maintain court and did not compose verses, Guru Har Rai reverted to the *sant* tradition of the first five Gurus. The Guru had very little conflict with the Mughal rulers except a suspicion in the mind of Aurangzeb that he had supported Dara Shikoh, Aurangzeb's rival in the war of succession. Accordingly, he sent a word to the Guru inviting him to his court. After a long debate and on the basis of consensus in the congregation, it was decided to send Ram Rai to Delhi along with some prominent Sikhs rather than the Guru presenting himself in the court.

Ram Rai was the elder son of the Guru but he did not give a good account of himself at Delhi. He showed miracles in the court much against the thinking of the Guru. Not only this, when Aurangzeb and his courtiers took objection to one of Guru Nanak's verses; "The ashes of the Muslim get into a potter's clod," Ram Rai hastened to say that it was a mistake committed by the calligraphist. What Guru Nanak had said was: "The ashes of the faithless get into a potter's clod." Aurangzeb was fully satisfied and made friends with Ram Rai bestowing on him a robe of honor and other favors. But when the news reached Guru Har Rai he was deeply distressed. He

said that he would have nothing to do with Ram Rai. He disowned him as his son and asked him not to return to him at all. It was because of this incident that he nominated his younger son (Guru) Harkrishan as his successor.

The ministry of Guru Har Rai was mild yet it was such that it won him general respect. Although he did not write verses, he inculcated respect for *the Gurbani* (Guru's writing) among the Sikhs. He started the practice of sounding the drum to indicate the start of *langar* (free vegetarian food). He also put the practice of standing while special prayer is said on a permanent footing.

Guru Har Rai passed away at the early age of thirty-one years in AD 1661. Though the records are silent about the end, it must have come unexpectedly, probably owing to some fatal illness.

### 8. GURU HARKRISHAN

Guru Harkrishan was the younger son of Guru Har Rai, the seventh Guru of the Sikhs. He was born at Kiratpur in July 1556. His elder brother Ram Rai had alienated himself from his father by hobnobbing with the Mughal court to the extent of misinterpreting the *Gurbani*. So when the end of Guru Har Rai, untimely though it was, he appointed Guru Harkrishan to succeed him in AD 1661 at the tender age of five years. Thus Guru Harkrishan the youngest Guru of the Sikhs. He is also sometimes referred to as the Bal Guru (Child Guru).

Guru Harkrishan had to contend with the suspicion and hostility of the Mughal court. Ram Rai was still at Delhi staking his claim putting forth that he had been deprived of guruship because of his friendship and proximity to the court. He could persuade Aurangzeb to summon Guru Harkrishan to Delhi. The Guru came to Delhi from Kiratpur in a large procession of followers who were asked to go back from Panjokhra near Ambala. However keeping up the resolve of his father, Guru Harkrishan refused to meet Aurangzeb. He stayed at Delhi in the bungalow of Mirza Raja Jai Singh where now stands Gurdwara Bangla Sahib.

It is said that Guru Harkrishan was an extremely charming child, fair of complexion with sharp features. He had bright eyes and there was a glow on his face. Even at that early age he remembered

a great many hymns of his predecessors and quoted them with amazing appropriateness. His major contribution is the maintenance of the *sant* tradition of Sikhism demonstrating a firmness of resolve in not meeting even the Emperor and providing continuity by indicating that his successor is "Baba Bakale".

The Guru contracted smallpox while at Delhi and died in AD 1664. He was cremated on the banks of the River Yamuna where Gurdwara Bala Sahib has been built.

### 9. GURU TECH BAHADUR

Guru Tegh Bahadur was the youngest son of Guru Hargobind-the sixth Guru of the Sikhs. He was an uncle of Guru Har Rai-the seventh Guru and a brother of the grandfather of Guru Harkrishan-the eighth Guru. He became the ninth Guru after the death of Guru Harkrishan. Because of this back-paddling in succession there were controversies. Dhirmal, son of his elder brother Gurditta, even made an unsuccessful assassination attempt on the Guru's life.

Guru Tegh Bahadur was born at Amritsar in AD 1621. He was brought up in the most approved Sikh style. As a young boy, he was placed under the teachings of Baba Buddha and Bhai Gurdas. The former supervised his training in archery and horsemanship and the latter taught him the old classics. The Guru made rapid progress and showed an early promise of mastery in both the fields. After Guru Har Rai was anointed as the seventh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur left Kiratpur and settled down at Bakala in Amritsar district. Here he spent many years and was installed as the ninth Guru in AD 1664.

After becoming the Guru, he took extensive tours of Punjab, Bihar, Bengal and Assam. When he went to Bengal, he had left his family at Patna where his only son Guru Gobind Singh was born in AD 1666. He later on founded Anandpur in the foothills of Himalayas, close to Kiratpur, by purchasing land from the hill chieftains.

During the ministry of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Aurangzeb's fanatic religious policy involving persecution and conversion of the Hindus was in full swing. Some Kashmiri Brahmins came to seek his advice at Anandpur. He told them: "Tell the king that all of you will become

Muslims if I am first converted to Islam." The message reached Aurangzeb who got the Guru arrested and brought to Delhi. On his refusal to accept Islam, he was publicly executed along with Bhai Dayala and Bhai Mati Das in AD 1675 at a place where now stands Gurdwara Sisganj in Delhi. Bhai Jaita, a devout Sikh took the Guru's head to Anandpur. Lakhi Shah, a Lubana Sikh, helped by his son carried the headless body to their home and cremated it by setting the house on fire. Gurdwara Rakabganj has been constructed at the site at a stone's throw from the Parliament House in Delhi.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom was the second important martyrdom in Sikh history-the first being that of Guru Arjan Dev. The first martyrdom in itself had proved to be a turning point but the second sowed the seeds of a complete transformation of the community by Guru Gobind Singh.

Guru Tegh Bahadur was a prolific writer. One hundred and fifteen (115) of his hymns are included in the revised version of the Adi Granth which was prepared under the supervision of Guru Gobind Singh and is now used as the Guru Granth Sahib. Among the Sikhs and Hindus the Guru is respected as a martyr in the cause of religious liberty. In the words of Guru Gobind Singh, "He died to preserve their right to wear their caste marks and sacred thread; he suffered martyrdom for the sake of his faith" (Vichitta Natak).

## 10. GURU GOBIND SINGH

Guru Gobind Singh was the only son of Guru Tegh Bahadur. He was born at Patna in December 1666. He spent the first six years of his life at Patna and then moved to Anandpur to receive education under his father's supervision. He was just nine years old when after the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur he inherited the responsibility of guiding the Sikh community as the tenth Guru at the most delicate time in history.

In the midst of his engagements with the concerns for the community, the Guru gave full attention to the mastery of physical skills and literary accomplishments. As a result of assiduous training, he gained unique facility in the use of arms. He showed similar prowess at learning. The Guru grew into a comely youth-smart, energetic and intellectual. Besides Punjabi, he gained proficiency in Braj, Sanskrit and Persian. He had a natural genius

for poetic composition. He patronized poets, thinkers and scholars. The Guru was an example of a perfect saint-soldier. He had been cherishing the idea of developing an army. He was able to build a small but well-trained army.

At the age of thirty-three, on the Baisakhi Day AD 1699 at Anandpur the Guru was ready to establish the Khalsa Panth, a new Sikh brotherhood imbued with bravery and sense of sacrifice. He did it in a dramatic manner in the congregation and introduced the unifying symbols and practices like baptism by *amrit*, five Ks, a code of conduct and a common salutation: "*Waheguru ji ka Khalsa; Waheguru ji ki Fate.*" The members of the Khalsa Panth were the images of the Guru. The Guru is the Khalsa; and the Khalsa is the Guru, became the guiding principle.

The event, however, generated considerable fear and animosity among the Hill Rajas. They conspired with the Mughal forces to subdue the Khalsa. The Guru had to fight many battles against them at Anandpur, Chamkaur and Muktsar. His two elder sons: Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh died fighting at Chamkaur. The two younger sons: Zorawar Singh and Fate Singh were captured by the Nawab of Sirhind and were bricked alive at Fatehgarh (Sirhind). The Guru sacrificed his entire family and underwent untold hardships fighting for righteousness. Through this experience, he sanctified the use of force, though only in defense of justice. His famous pronouncement in his letter to Aurangzeb-Zafarnama sums up his philosophy on the subject: "When all peaceful means have been tried and do not succeed, it is lawful to make use of the sword."

After the death of Aurangzeb in AD 1707, his successor Bahadur Shah made peace with the Guru. The Guru went to the Deccan to negotiate a peace agreement. But this was not to the liking of the Nawab of Sirhind. He dispatched two hired Pathans who fatally stabbed the Guru when he was camping at Nanded in October 1708. But before breathing his last, Guru Gobind Singh made his last contribution to the transformation of the Sikh Faith. He declared that henceforth the Guru Granth Sahib shall be the eternal Guru of the Sikhs thereby ending the succession of human Gurus. This put a seal of finality and permanence on the teachings of Sikhism.

