CHAPTER-IV

THE MILITARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

4.1.

Under the Sikh Gurus

4.1.1. Background:

The first five Sikh Gurus (1469-1606) as already noticed, confined their activities solely in the direction of educating the people spiritually and socially. Apart from the religious and social uplift, these Gurus also executed a number of new projects with the aid of their Sangat organisations, which included foundation of new towns, and construction and excavation of temples and paolis etc. The large scale construction activities and the propagation of the Sikh religion by the Gurus, led eventually to hostility between the Sikhism and Muslim orthodoxy. A number of complaints from the leaders of the Muslim orthodoxy, also contributed to an anti-Sikh stand by Akbar's successors.

This, however, does not suggest that there was a sudden change in the character of Guruship from the period of Guru Hargobind. It was, on the other hand a gradual development which culminated in the intolerance of the Mughal

1. It will appear from the writings of the early Gurus and especially those of the bards who began to write in the time to the Second Guru, that the terms such as Saccha Padshah, raj, takht, darbar etc., were not later innovations, but had been used from the beginning. Teja Singh, Ganda Singh, op.cit.,p.36.
emperor Jahangir and execution of Guru Arjun Dev.¹

The execution of Guru Arjun, convinced his successor as well as his followers that they must educate themselves in art of warfare, if they wanted to live. Seeing the needs of the times, Guru Arjun had placed his son with Bhai Buddha, the veteran Sikh, who was asked to make a soldier-saint out of him. Bhai Buddha not only instructed him in the sacred lore but also taught him the use of offensive and defensive weapons.²

Due to the execution of Guru Arjun Dev, the peaceful and conciliatory approach was rendered impossible and the official challenge to the new faith was thus met through armed resistance. The new approach, incidently needed the introduction of one more subject in the curriculum of the Sikh education i.e. military education.

4.1.2. Beginning of the Military education:

Guru Hargobind was the first among the Sikh Gurus who was taught the use of offensive and defensive weapons, besides riding, hunting, wrestling and many other sports.


2. Teja Singh Ganda Singh, op.cit., p.39
Bhai Gurdas says about Guru Hargobind as: 'The breaker of enemies ranks, the brave, heroic Guru is yet a lover of mankind' Var. 1, 48;
Under Bhai Buddha's training, Hargobind soon grew up to be an all round warrior, a healthy and strong man, as well as saintly and enlightened. Kavi Sohan, the biographer of Guru Hargobind refers to military education imparted to the Guru:

'Shastar Shastar ki Vidya Pai,
Hargobind man at harkhai.'

On the occasion of his accession, the Guru wore two swords, one for spiritual power—Peeri, and the other for military power—Meeri:

'Do as lai Bhagwant tabai Gur ke gar dar diye harkhai,
Miri ki Mir aur Piri ki Pir su dou dhari Bhagwant alai'

A Hukumnama was issued to all the Masands asking the Sikhs to bring, in future, arms and horses as a part of their offerings. The city of Amritsar was strengthened by putting up a small fortification, called Lohgarh. In 1609, he also built a meeting place for the Sikhs and called it the Akal Takhat, or the Throne of the Almighty.

1. Kavi Sohan, Gurbilas Patshahi-6, Chapt.iii, Shalok,74.
2. Ibid., chapter, viii, shaloka 34
In the Akal Takht, besides praying and preaching, discussions were also held on issues concerning the welfare of the community besides training in art of warfare. It was further ordered that the offerings of arms and ammunition were to be made first at the Akal Takhat after which the prayers at the Harimandir could be held.

Guru Hargobind's career marks a turning point in the Sikh education. On account of force of circumstances, Sikhism was becoming militant, with increasing emphasis on military education.

4.1.3. Training in Arms:

The Miri-Piri concept of Guru Hargobind necessitated the training in arms to meet the official challenge. Thereafter, the collection of horses and arms, training in the use of weapons and art of warfare, the practice of wrestling and hunting and other mainly games essential to military education, and construction of fortifications etc. became regular features.

1. Kavi Sohan, op.cit., Chapter, viii, Shaloka 72,76.
2. The Sikhs had already took to horse-trading under the instructions from the fourth Guru, Ram Das. During the period of Guru Arjun, many Sikhs had took to adventurous trade in horses for which purpose they undertook long journies even to Kabul and Turkistan. (Teja Singh Ganda Singh, op.cit., p.28). Guru Arjun had come to talk of his struggles in terms of wrestling matches. Sri Rag.
3. For example Lohgarh fortifications around the town of Amritsar.
Guru Hargobind realised that the fight with the Mughal power would come sooner or later. He therefore trained a small army and kept it in good trim. It is reported that the Guru had 800 horses, 300 trained horsemen and 80 artillery-men. He enrolled a bodyguard of fifty-two stout Sikhs, who formed a nucleus of his future army. Five hundred youths came from Majha, Malwa and the Doab to offer their services to dare and die for their religion. They did not want any pay. The Guru gave them each a horse and simple weapons of war, and formed a little army out of them.

The Guru kept up the spirits of his small army through frequent hunting expeditions and also by arranging games and wrestling matches. There was necessarily a change in the Guru's habits and we are told that he systematically turned his attention to chase, hunting and war like exercises.

The contemporary Muslim writer Mohsin Fani also indirectly supports the military aptitude of the Guru. He writes: 'He (Hargobind) had many difficulties to contend with. One of

5. Kavi Sohan, *op.cit.*, Chapter 8, Shaloka, 64.
them was that he adopted the style of a soldier, wore a sword contrary to the custom of his father, maintained a retinue and began to follow the chase.¹

About the army of Guru Hargobind, Mohsin Fani says: 'The Guru had 800 horses in his stable, 300 troopers on horseback and 60 men with fire arms were always in his service.'²

The Guru also enlisted bands of Pathan mercenaries, and a Pathan chief named Painda Khan became one of his most able and trusted adherents³. There is indirect evidence also in the verses composed by Bhai Gurdas about the emphasis laid on the military education by the Guru, which had been causing some misgivings among a section of the Sikhs. Although Bhai Gurdas does not dispute the apparent truth of the people's allegations and apprehensions, he expresses his firm belief that the Guru's motive will soon become clear and then everybody will learn to appreciate his actions.⁴

¹ Mohsin Fani, Dabistan-i-Mazahib, Engl. tr. by David Shea and Anthony Troyer (Lahore, 1973), II, 23. Two of the latter Sikh works (Panth Parkash, p. 107 and Itihas Guru Khalsa, p. 128) even mention that Guru Hargobind commanded 700 horse, 1,000 foot and 7 guns in the Mughal government, which seems to be baseless. I.B. Banerjee, op.cit., p. 13.
³ M.A. Maclaliffe, op.cit., IV, pp. 52, 76.
The Guru had to fight three battles which were thrust upon him by the Mughals. The first battle, due to the forcible capture of Guru's horses by the Governor of Lahore (1628); the second battle near Lehra in 1931 and the third battle in which Painde Khan got wounded was fought at Kartarpur in 1634. The Guru's success in all the three battles exhibited the fine military training imparted to his Sikhs as also the courage and confidence he had created among his followers.

By the time of the second battle, Guru Hargobind is said to have trained about 4,000 armed Sikhs. Their number was augmented by stalwarts from the Malwa territory— the Brars and the Gills, the Dhaliwals and the Dullats, the Chahls and the Sandhus—who came forward to receive military education with a view to fight for their faith.¹ For Sikhs, the roles of saint and soldier had become mutually complementary.²

¹ Harbans Singh, op.cit., p.33.
² Ibid., p.34. During course of his travels (after his release from the Gwalior fort in 1627), Guru Hargobind consolidated his temporal and spiritual hold on the community. On his way back to Amritsar, he accepted from the Raja of Bilaspur, a gift of plot of land lying between the foothills of the Himalayas and the river Sutlej. Here he built himself a retreat which he named Kiratpur. Adjoining to it was Anandpur which later became the headquarters of Guru Gobind Singh for propagating the pacifist faith of Nanak as well as the martial mission of Hargobind. Khushwant Singh, op.cit., Vol.I, pp.64-65.
4.1.4. Har Rai (1630-1661)

Guru Har Rai, the seventh in succession, was the second Guru who continued the martial mission of Guru Hargobind Singh. By the time of Guru Har Rai, great number of peasants had answered the call to arms. The Guru is reported as having trained over 2,200 men in arms. However, basically he was a man of peace. He loved to hunt, but only to bring back wild animals for his private zoo at Kiratpur.¹

4.1.5.

Under Guru Gobind Singh

As we have noticed in the previous pages, the tragedy of Guru Arjun's death at the hands of the Mughal emperor and the growing Muslim orthodoxy, drove home the lesson of not merely urgency but immediacy in the adoption of measures for self-defence. Guru Hargobind was the first Sikh Guru to bring about a change which was a combination of spiritual with temporal concepts. The new pontiff, collected arms, equipment and horses, trained his people in the technique of fighting by organising regular training exercises.²

¹ Harbans Singh, *op.cit.*, p.69.
After a brief interval of about three decades, the tradition was revived by Guru Gobind Singh. This was again due to the peculiar circumstances when people were helplessly smarting under what was considered the oppressive and intolerant regime of Emperor Aurangzeb.¹ The Guru was confronted with a situation of formidable challenge and difficulty due to the new turn the tide had taken in the time of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur. The Guru, therefore set himself to the task of meeting the challenge.

Guru Gobind Singh and Theoretical Training in Warfare:

(through the concept of Dharamayudh)

4.1.6. Spirit of Self-sacrifice:

Before taking up to arms, Guru Gobind Singh evolved a suitable theory of struggle, which would not only explain its aims but also boost the morale of its participants. Such a theory was evolved by the Guru by amplification or expansion of certain ideas of his inherited ideology and heritage of the land. These ideas were as follows:

(a) God as the eternal Protector of good against their detractors and oppressors,

(b) Ethical value of the struggles waged by the heroes and heroines of the Hindu mythology;

Uncompromising resistance to tyranny; and justification for the use of force in a fight against tyranny.¹

All the above ideal were systematically developed into a definite theory which the Guru designated as Dharamyudh and of which he declared himself to be divinely ordained agent.² There was however, a note of caution to guard against the impression created by the Hindu tradition in which victory always came to the champions of good without any loss or defeat. The Sikh tradition coming down to him, to which he fully subscribed, pointed to the difficulty of the road to success and admitted sacrifice and suffering as inevitable concomitants of any struggle of righteousness.³

The Guru greatly prized the victory in a Dharamyudh but death in it, as indeed all resultant suffering, was to him glorious and something to be clearly cherished. He writes:

'Grant me this boon, O God, from thy Greatness,
May I never refrain from righteous acts;
May I fight without fear all foes in life's battle;


3. 'Should you desire to be a player in the game of love, come prepared for self-sacrifice. Should you venture to tread this path, sacrifice your head without demur.' Guru Nanak, Shalok Varan to Wadhik, Adi Granth, p.1412.
with confident courage, claiming the victory;
May my highest ambition be signing thy praises;
and may Thy Glory be grained in my mind;
when this mortal frame reaches its limits;
May I die fighting with limitless courage; ¹

The theory of Dharam-yudh thus evolved was elaborated
further by incorporating into it new and original elements
such as the concept of God as the Mightiest warrior and the
investiture of weapons with divinity. God was viewed as the
expert and wearer of all weapons and His might was represented
as unmatched by any one else. The purpose behind this seems
to be to heighten the effect of God's intervention in support
of a good cause against evil and thereby to prove the
impossibility of defeat of the warriors of good operating
under His benevolent care and protection. ²

Naturally, the use of force was of pivotal importance
in Guru Gobind Singh's theory of Dharam-yudh. But it should
not be confused with militarism in which force is employed
for the sake of force, aggression or self-aggrandisement,
for it was made object to some major qualifications:

(i) It must be for a cause legitimate and noble;
(ii) It must be a remedy of the last resort. ³

Guru's theory of the Dharam-yudh may be summed up in his own words:

'Glory to noble souls who on their earthly way carry upon their lips the Name of the Lord, and ever contemplate deep within their hearts the good fight's spirit; Knowing that the body is a fleeting vesture, They make the lor's song, they make the Lord's Name A boat to carry them over life's rough ocean; They wear as a garment that is as a fortress serene detachment;

That the Guru's valour and perfection in the military training and the use of arms were intended and employed for promoting the cause of righteousness is corroborated by several other contemporary and near-contemporary writers. According to Senapat, the creation of the Khalsa was motivated as under:

'For this was the Khalsa created: To fight the evil, to smite the wicked, and to get rid of the crises.'

1. Dasam Granth, Krishanavtar, Sacred writings of the Sikhs, pp.274-75.

2. Next to Guru Gobind Singh's own compositions, the most important contemporary source on Guru Gobind Singh is Gursobha of Saina Pat. He was one of the bards in Guru's employ and was thus one of his closest associates. He began his work in 1758/1701 A.D.

3. Senapat, Gursobha, 14/130. This clearly points out to the purpose of the Dharam-yudh to which a reference has been made above.
Another contemporary, Bhai Nand Lal Goya, who spent several years in Guru Gobind Singh's camp, has made the picture still more clear. He pictures the Guru as being at once a saint and a king:

'Badshah darvesh' or

'Ham dervesh wa ham sultan'. In his first capacity the Guru is depicted as a man of God, whereas in the second he is shown as an exemplary dispenser of justice, and administrator and a peerless warrior.¹

The Guru has been portrayed as one who would practise oppression against none, who would cherish the poor and crush the wicked. Guru Gobind Singh explained his aims to Bhai Nand Lal in the following manner:

'Listen, O Nand Lal, to this truth:

Our own Raj I would manifest;
The four castes I would make into one;
God's Name would then on all lips be;
And my men would be riding horses and flying hawks;
A sight that would put the Turks to rout.'²

An essential part of the Guru's Rehet injunctions for the Khalsa was the obligatory use of certain common articles of apparel; namely Kes (unshorn hair); Kangha (comb); Kachh (shorts) and some arms Kirpan (sword) and Kara (iron bangle)

2. Sarb Loh; Gursobha (of Senapat) p.105.
the last two stood for heroism and defence of righteousness. One may not have any objection to the view of some scholars that in the beginning these articles were introduced for military and political reasons. They were introduced because of their tremendous value in active military life and also for the reason that they were marks of political defence and self-respect. Thus each initiate into the fold of the Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa had to pass through the ceremony of Khande-ki-pahul.

The distinguishing mark of the Khande-ki-pahul, as the name suggests was the use of double-edged sword in its preparation. The Khanda did not symbolise power or glory so much as the determination of the Khalsa to identify themselves in public and, if necessary, to defend the claims of their conscience with physical force. It may be pointed out in this connection that in the often quoted verse of Guru Gobind Singh's zafarnama:

"When all other alternatives fail, it is lawful to resort

1. For details concerning the creation of Khalsa and the five K's see,
   Teja Singh Ganda Singh, op.cit., pp.68-70;
   J.D.Cunningham, op.cit., pp.60-63;
   Bhagat Lakshman Singh, op.cit., Chapter VII.
   J.S.Grewal and S.S.Bal, op.cit., Chapter VI.

2. Among the Persian sources of Guru Gobind Singh's period, the zafarnama or Persian epistle of Aurangzeb, was written by Guru Gobind Singh at Dina, where he halted for some time, in between Chamkaur and Khidrane.
to sword. The emphasis is on the last resort rather than the use of arms. Thus the use of arms primarily in self defence was satisfied.¹

Through baptism, Guru Gobind Singh thus not only pured the life of his Sikhs, and elevated and altered the constitution of their minds, but also turned them as ready and trained warrior class. A tremendous change was affected in the whole tone of the national character. Even those people who had been considered as dregs of humanity were changed, as if by magic, into something rich and strange. The sweepers, barbers and confectioners, who had never so much as touched the sword and whose generations had lived as grovelling slaves of the so-called higher classes, became, under the stimulating leadership of Guru Gobind Singh, doughty warriors who never shrank from fear and who were ready to rush into the jaws of death at the bidding of their Guru.²

CHAPTER IV

THE MILITARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING (Continued)

4.2. Maharaja Ranjit Singh and The Military Education.

While young Ranjit Singh was put to school, according to the custom under the care of Bhai Phagu (Bhag) Singh, the Granthi of a dharamsala in Gujranwala, the young pupil did not show any aptitude for such an education. On the other hand, he possessed an aptitude for military education which in those days consisted in sword-play, musketry and horse-riding, which Sikh chiefs like his father and legendary heroes of the Punjab like Raja Salwan of Sialkot had received early to equip themselves for a career of war and conquest. His teacher, therefore, was not a Granthi but a soldier, Sahib Singh, by name, who instructed him in the arts of war and accompanied him in most of his early campaigns. His son, Sher Singh, received, later on, the title of ustād or master, for his proficiency as a swordsman, and became a respected official at Ranjit Singh's court.

Educated like a soldier himself, Ranjit Singh introduced military education among his soldiers long before he employed European instructors to train his armies. He gave personal attention to their drill and equipment and himself went through the formal exercise.\(^1\) In the training

of officers he took an equally keen interest. The officers of
his battalions, according to the Maharaja himself, were all
sons of Sardars. When a Sardar had more than one son, the
Maharaja took one when young and had him educated for military
career. Every Sardar was head of police, of jurisdiction,
revenue etc.

Ranjit Singh employed renowned masters for instructing
them in military arts. Mian Qadir Bakhsh received special
training in the art of gunnery under French Military Officers.
Sardar Lehna Singh was the genius of the Sikh ordinance and
well-versed in science of artillery. Sahib Singh was his
own Ustad. His son, Sher Singh, also became a royal instruc-
tor. He was given the title of Ustad for his proficiency
as a swordsman. Shamir Singh, of the same family, was a
celebrated shot, but he preferred the bow to the musket,
and bow in his hands became a deadly weapon. It was he who
built the Fort of Gobind Garh. Bhag Singh of the village
Bhaga in the district of Amritsar was a painter with a skill
in casting arms.

Another teacher of officers was Sabit Khan, one
Afghan celebrated for his skill at the sword and the pistol
while riding. He, previously in the employ of the Maharaja
Jaswant Rao Hulkar, but now found a new patron in the Maharaja.

2. Ibid.
Some of young officers were attached to European and military officers. They took down their instructions in artillery in Punjabi for their future guidance and learnt from them the arts of making arms and ammunition. The translation of 'Martial Law' made into Punjabi with the help of 'Court' is said to have been familiar to the Sikh youth.  

The Maharaja is fond of children, writes McGregor and many of his Sardars' sons are bred up under his eye, and instructed in riding and the use of arms. By this means they get attached to him and when able to assume commands they never fail of succeeding to important ones. With his usual discrimination, Ranjit seldom makes choice of a subject unworthy of it.  

Occasionally special drill parades of these youths were held in the Court, particularly when some foreigners were present as royal guests, and these young officers were called upon to show their skill in arms. Once Ranjit Singh put a pea on the point of a spear and invited all the Sirdars to shoot at it from a considerable distance. Prince Sher Singh hit it at the first shot and got six villages as prize from the Maharaja.

3. For a statistical account of the regular army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, as recorded in 1844, see Appendix, X.
The officers, so trained, distinguished themselves early in their military career. Mehtab Singh, son of Manna Singh Majitha was placed in the irregular cavalry as a subedar when quite young and made a colonel at 20, and put in charge of two regiments. Another such name was Mangal Singh (born in 1800) of Ramgarhia misal, who came to the court in younger days. He got military training together with liberal education. After Annexation he did a great deal by his influence to propagate the cause of female education.

Muslim youth were also given training and promoted to high positions. Muhammads Shah, son of Imam Shah, a Colonel of artillery was made a commandant of artillery while he was only 18 years old. After Annexation he received the order of creditable work on cavalry tactics. Malik Muhammad Badozoi of Multan was only 16 when Diwan Sawan Mal placed him in command of 10 sowars on Rs.1200 per annum.1

1. J.M.Honighberger, Thirty Five Years in the East: Adventures, Discoveries, Experiments and Historical Sketches relating to the Punjab and Cashmere, etc. (Calcutta, 1852), pp.179-181

Dr.Honighberger was a court physician and an ordnance officer in charge of gun-powder manufactory as Lahore. He closes his account with the First Anglo-Sikh War and the appointment of a Resident as the Sikh capital for the administration of the Punjab. Ganda Singh, A Bibliography of the Punjab, (Patiala, 1966), p.51.