Chapter-VII

MARTYRDOM : THE SIKH WAY

The term ‘Martyr’ is derived from the Greek word ‘miartyr’ which means witness. It signifies a person who stakes his life as a supreme sacrifice for his faith and thus bears witness to its truth and to his passionate commitment to his ideals. So “a martyr is one who lays his life in the cause of religion or faith⁴”. A martyr is the crown and glory of the human race who affirms by his death that to man his values are far more important than his muddy vesture of clay. Human history is dotted by such martyrs who laid an aura of sanctity to their dispensation. His death also rudely shakes the complacency of his ordinary fellow mortals who are over-awed by the cool and calm of the martyr.

A martyr, according to Tirlochan Singh is, “one who suffers torments, tortures and death to uphold his ideals, conviction and faith which awakens the sleeping minds of the oppressed and frightened humanity⁵”. Emerson, the leader of the nineteenth century
transcendental movement in America too stresses this role of the martyr.

The martyr cannot be dishonoured. Every lash inflicted is a tongue of flame; every prison a more illustrious abode... every suppressed or expunged word reverbrates through the earth from side to side. Hours of sanity or consideration are always arriving to communities as to individuals when the truth is seen and the martyrs are justified.

Socrates set the supreme example when he drank the cup of hemlock with a rare cheerfulness and calm of mind to show his surrounding followers that man’s values are dearer to him than even his life. God sent his own son, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ to suffer martyrdom to redeem the sins of fallen mankind. Without any rancour towards his persecutors, Jesus went to the cross forgiving his foes for their ignorance and false beliefs: “Forgive them O’Lord, for they know not what they do”. G.S. Talib regards the ‘Christ figure’ as “the archetype of the martyr” and his “crown of thorns and the ‘stigmata’ on this holy frame” as “truly the brand of martyr”. From Christ’s martyrdom, Talib draws a general definition of the martyr: “The steadfast, innocent sufferer for truth at the hands of ignorant or immortal wielders of authority is the ideal martyr, whose example not only inspires others to similar feats of self-sacrifice, but confirms the
ideals defended by the original martyr in the minds of the vast numbers of people, so that his message spreads and becomes what has been called the seeds of the Church\textsuperscript{5}.

In fact, persecution is as old as religion itself. Every form of dissent from the tribe has been seen with the bitter eye of disapproval and the attempts had been made to stifle it with every mode of coercion. The Christians suffered martyrdom in thousands during the Roman empire and then suffered those who resisted the wrongs of the powerful Papacy that could not brook any form of non-conformity to its establishment. The ecclesiastical law, which opposed enlightened thinking, came heavily upon the protagonists of new thought. The papacy did not spare even scientific thinkers like Galileo and Bruno. Though Galileo managed to save his life, Bruno met the tragic fate. Internecine warfare between protestants and Catholics produced a string of martyrs, each denomination claiming its martyr a status of unenviable supremacy. The Jews suffered at the hands of the Christians and their sufferings that started from the day of Exodus to the present day form a dark line of blemish on the face of humanity. Persecution is “the genesis of course, of the situation in which heroic and dedicated spirits enact the great and noble drama of martyrdom\textsuperscript{6}.”
The unflinching courage and fortitude with which hundreds and thousands of martyrs like Lollards in England, Hughenots in France and hosts of them in Spain and other parts of Europe bear testimony to the fact that no fear of inquisition or stake could deflect them from their faith. Socrates at seventy, Joan of Arc at seventeen were imbued with the same zeal and commitment to their conviction.

Moral and spiritual experience of martyrdom was something unique in the Sikh annals. Tirlochan Singh says that “there was no concept of martyrdom in Hindu Buddhist history”. The Hindu philosophy of immanence and pantheism generated a spirit of tolerance and accommodation and there was not much hostility among its various denominations. Moreover, the doctrine of *ahimsa* and renunciation as a spiritual ideal left not much scope for theological wranglings that lead to opaque minds blinded by orthodoxy and fanaticism. The influence of great monarchs like Ashoka and Harshvardhana led to catholicity of faith and persecution that leads to martyrdom, seemed alien to these. However, the Jains and the Buddhists were sometimes subjected to persecution by the followers of the Vedic faith. After overthrowing the Mauryan empire, a Brahmin
Commander-in-Chief Pushapamitra in his zeal to revive Brahminism, collected the heads of Buddhist monks. And at the time of Brahminical revival of the post-Buddhististic era, there is a mention again of persecution of the Buddhists.

The advent of Islam into India brought altogether a new culture – a composite of the Jewish, Hellenistic and Arabic elements. This composite culture expressed itself through the Persian language, the basis of which was the Arabic, conditioned to be the vehicle of philosophical thought. Islam brought a rich history of martyrs. Its clash with the pacifist Indian culture and its incorrigible zeal to spread Islam led to the rise of the institution of martyrdom in this land.

In the Muslim tradition, the parallel term for martyr is shahid, which literally signifies the same, that is witness. The Arabic word for martyr in Quran, and in Muslim theology is Shahid which means “present as a witness”. The Mohammedan law, however, extends the scope of definition, for it includes not only those who die in defence of faith but also those whose deaths are supposed to excite the compassion of their followers. Says the Holy Quran: Who so obeys God and Apostles, these are with those whom God has been well-pleased - with prophets and confessers and martyrs and the righteous, a fair company are they.

159
Moreover, in Islam, martyrdom is closely associated with Jihad which enjoys religious sanction. T.P. Hughes defines Jihad as "a religious war with those who are unbelievers in the mission of Mohammed. It is an incumbent religious duty established in Quran and in the traditions as a divine institution, and enjoined specially for the purpose of advancing repelling evil from Muslims⁹". Says the Quran: Count not those who are killed in the War of God as dead, but living with their Lord¹⁰.

The Muslim law, however, includes some more categories of death in the martyr tradition. For instance, persons slain unjustly, persons who die in such a manner to excite public sympathy such as by sudden death, or from some malignant disease or in child birth or in the acquirement of knowledge or in a strange land or dying on Thursday night. These unnatural deaths gave birth to concepts like bir, baital, bhut, churel, etc., the malignant spirits which were to be appeased by worship to ward off their evil influence on human beings. This form of worship permeated into the Indian folkloristic culture, especially the pre-Singh Sabha Sanatan Dharma in Sikhism and with great assertion the illiterate Sikhs were weaned away from these superstitions and the definition of Shahid borrowed from the Persian and Arabic vocabulary was marginalised.
The Muslim tradition of martyrdom goes back to the prophet's times when Imam Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet, fell on the battlefield of Karbala with the members of his family and tribe. Then the term was also applied to those who died on the side of the Prophet in the battle of Badr. Mansur-al-Hallaj enjoys great reverence in the popular Muslim imagination. This famous mystic was impaled in Baghdad in the ninth century, for uttering *Ana Haq* (I am God) by the Muslim orthodoxy which branded the utterance as blasphemous. Shams-I-Tabriz, the perceptor of greater philosopher of Sufism Jalaluddin Rumi, was flayed alive, for the Muslim orthodoxy have never been lenient to Sufism. According to popular Islamic tradition, the *Shahid* receives the highest ranks in paradise occupying the place nearest the throne of God. The objective of struggle for righteousness or carrying out the will of God results in martyrdom which inspires the future generation to maintain righteousness and claims of conscience against bat-eyed orthodoxy that brooks no opposition or dissent. As *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* adds: “There is fairly unanimous tradition in Iran that the Iranian prophet Zarathushtra himself ended his life for the cause of his religion and faith along with eighty of his priests”. A martyr is the supreme archetype of the human race for he becomes a beacon of light to guide the spiritual destiny of others.
Toynbee rightly says: “If God’s love has gone into action in this world in the redemption of mankind by Christ, then man’s efforts to make himself like of God must include efforts to follow Christ’s examples in sacrificing himself for the redemption of his fellowmen.”

II

The Sikh adoption of the word *Shahid* is neither a concession to the Islamic faith or the acknowledgement of its exclusiveness, nor, as some contemporary Sikh scholars aver, to chalk out a different course in order to break away from the Brahminical orthodoxy, but as a term that had become a part of the cultural taxonomy of India. Guru Nanak, the founder of The Sikh faith, was primarily a poet who expressed his revelatory experience, a universal message, through the poetic medium that could be easily communicated to all irrespective of caste and creed, birth and breed. We find numerous Muslim names for God and spirituality in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Similarly, words like *Shahidi* or *Shahadat* acquired popular currency and *Shahid* became a part of the cultural taxonomy of India.

Martyrdom in Sikhism enjoys a unique place as an institution and was emphatically laid down by Guru Nanak and followed by Sikhs after him. About this institution Kharak Singh says: “In the Sikh form the
institution is a complete departure from the Indian tradition, and for that matter radically distinguishes it, from the whole-life character of Sikhism from the earlier dichotomous or pacific Indian religious traditions. In the very beginning of the Japuji, Guru Nanak raises the question: How to attain the status of sachiar (truthful) and to sunder the wall of nescience? His answer is: By acquiescing in the Divine Will. This Will is the matrix of all virtues and it is the highest form of love. Life is a game of love that demands total self-surrender. He says: “Shouldst thou seek to engage in the game of love, step into my street with thy head placed on thy palm: While on to this stepping, ungrudgingly sacrifice your head". Thus, Guru Nanak defined the institution of martyrdom, “an essential ingredient of the path he was laying down for man”. It was “a path sharper than the edge of a double-edged sword”.

Guru Nanak’s conception of love is reiterated by the Fifth Master when he says that if love could be purchased with gold, then Ravana had not to offer his head to Lord Shiva. The word Shahid thus occurs not only in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Bhai Gurdas also uses at four times in his Vars. Guru Amar Das uses the words khannion tikkhi, valon nikki, sharper than dagger point and thinner than a hair for the faith of Guru Nanak. Guru Gobind Singh’s verse endorses Guru
Nanak’s faith, “Jin prem kio tin hi prabh payo (I utter nothing but truth, that he alone attaineth God, who loveth)”. Bhai Gurdas tells us that only by becoming dead in life (totally detached) one can become a true disciple and that a true and sincere Sikh must have three basic qualities sabr (patience), sidq (deep faith) and shahid (the spirit of a martyr). Bhai Jodh Singh regards Sikh martyrdom as grounded firmly in Sikh ideology and extols the Sikh conception of love as the willing acceptance of Lord’s will. Jagjit Singh rightly observes: “Sikh history is a tale of sacrifices, persecutions and martyrdoms invited by the Sikhs in the service of their mission. It is for the mission that the Gurus had inspired, prepared and led them”.

Bhai Kahan Singh in his *Mahan Kosh* makes four entries regarding the definition of a martyr in Sikhism: “A martyr is one who is a witness to his faith; whose martyrdom sets an example for others as the defender of faith; one who has staked his life in Dharam-Yudh; and for the Shahidan Misl named after the celebrated Sikh martyr Baba Deep Singh Ji”. In Sikhism, sacrifice, therefore carries a special spiritual and metaphysical connotation. Bravery, courage, fearlessness and fortitude are the notable characteristics of a Sikh martyr. Guru Nanak speaks of a kind of dying which gives permanent life devoid of pain. Guru says: People of the world! revile not death, should one
know how to die. Again: “Those who fight against tyranny for a noble cause, without forgetting the Lord, the death cannot have any terror for them and their death is approved by God.” Even Bhagat Kabir endorses this view when he hails a hero as one who fights for his faith and may be hacked limb by limb, yet shall not recant his faith. Thus the Sikh tradition of martyrdom moves on from Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur to the Sikhs of the succeeding generations who bore every kind of torture and yet remained firm and steadfast in faith and are remembered by the Sikhs at the time of ardas. A martyr in Sikhism is “not only a saint but also a saint-soldier. He fights and dies for a holy cause” and “patience in the face of sufferings and total submission to Divine Will are the main features of a Sikh martyr.”

In Sikhism, emphasis is also laid on living martyrs. Guru Nanak says: “By sacrifice of self comes liberation: Thereby are mind and body purified.” Similarly, Guru Arjan Dev says: “Accept first death as inevitable, and attachment to life discard; Turn dust of feet of all – therefore to us come.” Then again: “Those dead to the world regard living; those living for the world know to be dead.” Even Kabir says: “Rare is such a one as dies to the world while living.”
Martyrdom, says G.W. Bowersock, remains “a powerful force at the intersection of religion and politics”. Since in Sikhism the spiritual and the temporal, the religion and the politics coalesce, for Sikhism is a whole-life religion, martyrdom acquires a specific tradition. The Sikh Shahids, says Louis E. Fenech, “give their lives to uphold righteousness (dharam) under the most painful and chilling circumstances, providing testimony (shahadat) to their faith with their blood”. The Sikh seeks martyrdom in the battlefield for the cause of righteousness. In his spectacular death the martyr shows to the world his distinct identity. It is this aspect of martyrdom that forms an essential component in Sikhism, where a Sikh is released from the fear of death, fear of oppression and injustice and fear of want.

Moreover, Guru Nanak’s Babar vani has been hailed by historians and theologians as an expression of courage. The way he admonished invading Mughals and the rulers of the day – the Lodhis - who failed in their duty to protect the people, amply demonstrate his anguish at the wanton destruction wrought by the invading hordes. Hymns reveal that Guru Nanak had all the characteristics that a martyr possesses – defiance, resistance, courage and fearlessness. With the rise of Guru
Nanak there arises “a galaxy of saints who are also warriors” dedicated to the service of others and that men grew “not only in the soul but became more broad of limb, more full of defiance against earthly odds and fighting not for the self... but for values and against tyranny, whether political or social, from whatever quarter it comes\textsuperscript{35}”. Guru Nanak was thus truly heroic who brought the idea of martyrdom which was more or less alien to Indian thought. It is on the basis of these observations that Fenech concludes: “Despite the fact that the Guru was not a martyr, he possessed all the characteristics of one” and thus hails him as “a potential martyr” and further says that the “martyr tradition provides a framework to interpret the Adi Granth” which in turn “provides the material for the martyr tradition\textsuperscript{36}”.

Thus, Nanak’s theology of liberation is the matrix of Sikh martyr tradition as says G.S.Talib “… in Guru Nanak’s own life a situation demanding his entering into active conflict with organized tyranny did not happen to arise ... if he escaped martyrdom, it was perhaps because the rulers of the day did not awake to his full meaning, under the impression that he was, after all, a sadhu\textsuperscript{37}.

The ideal Sikh, the gurmukh, is an instrument of God’s will. He is not supposed to shut his eyes to oppression or quail before the forces of tyranny but battle against them to achieve martyrdom. He must cultivate qualities like selfless service, truth, patience, courage, self-
surrender, humility and self-respect to become a potential martyr to achieve martyrdom whenever the situation so demands. Louis E. Fenech rightly states: Where in other religious traditions martyrdom is an act which redeems ... in Sikhism only the redeemed are capable of martyrdom. And thus, the realization of \textit{sachkhand} is not the end of spiritual journey according to the Sikh tradition of martyrdom.\textsuperscript{38}

\textit{Haumai} is the greatest impediment to attain the status of a \textit{gurmukh} and \textit{haumai} is not only centred in the individual but in the social and political institutions as well. To seek liberation from every form of \textit{haumai} is, therefore, the ideal of Sikhism. “Manifestation of \textit{haumai} in the form of social and political aggrandizement\textsuperscript{39}” must be eradicated. Fearlessness, therefore, becomes the cardinal principle of the Sikh faith. It is not only defined as one of the attributes of God but also the basis of Sikh heroism. “Nanak was not only describing an attribute of divine being, but also inculcating in the minds of his followers the spirit of fearlessness towards established political authority\textsuperscript{40}”. It was this fearlessness that was practised and advocated by the succeeding Gurus and culminated in the creation of the \textit{Khalsa}. 

168
Although historical sources are not unanimous with regard to the political and personal machinations with regard to Guru Arjan Dev’s martyrdom, he is hailed as the first and the prince of martyrs, an epitome of fearlessness, forebearance and fortitude in the annals of the Sikh faith. Since Guru Arjan Dev’s persecution was held in camera and his death lacked the public spectacle, many conjectures have been made with regard to the actual cause of his martyrdom. Chandu Shah, an influential Hindu official’s personal enmity, ill-will of Pirthi Chand, Guru Ram Das’s eldest son, hostility of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, the fanatic head of the Naqshbandi order and the Guru’s alleged blessings and help to the rebel prince Khusro, are cited as the important factors that instigated and prompted the emperor to the execution of Guru Arjan. *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* is regarded as the best and the most reliable authority on the martyrdom of the Guru.

In *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, the emperor states that there lived at Goindwal a Hindu named Arjan in the garb of a *Pir* and *Shaikh* who captivated “the hearts of many simple minded Hindus” and “of foolish and stupid Muslims and had noised himself about as a religious and worldly leader” and that when Khusro passed along this road, he
“conveyed pre-conceived things to him and made on his forehead a finger mark in saffron... called Qashqa (Tika)”. The emperor finally states that he ordered that the Guru “should be put to death with torture”.

Thus the two charges trumped against the Guru that he had a following amongst the Hindus and Muslims and wielded a considerable influence and that he supported the rebel prince are said to be major causes of his martyrdom. Besides there was a conflict of ideologies between them. Muslim assertion over indigenous spiritual values and cultural traditions was objected by the Guru. The Arabic socio-political system was alien to Indian system. Sikhs wanted to preserve their culture and heritage as well as their independence regarding their faith and their right to live with dignity and grace for which Jahangir attacked the Sikh society.

It is true that Guru Arjan held a court and was hailed by his followers as Sachcha Padshah and his court reflected the pomp and splendour of royalty. Masands from far-flung places brought precious gifts and money, given by the devout, and the business of the Sikhs in Amritsar flourished and Sikhism looked like a ‘separate state within the Mughal state’. No emperor can afford to see the erosion of his
authority and the decline of his power and influence in his province. This seems to be the basic cause of Guru Arjan’s martyrdom.

As regards the Khusro affair, historians do not regard it as a cogent reason. No doubt, the rebel prince visited the Guru at Tarn Taran and like all visitors he was welcome to the house of Nanak. Ganda Singh dismisses the Tika affair as “a pure and simple concoction of some conspirators’ fertile imagination to exploit the emperor’s emotions against the Guru⁴³”. Says Ganda Singh: “Never in the whole history of the Sikh Gurus, there had been any occasion for any Guru to anoint anyone... The Teeka or Tilak ceremony of the succeeding Guru was always performed by a leading Sikh. In the case of Guru Angad to Guru Arjan, the ceremony was performed by Bhai Budha... and the same practice was followed upto ... the last Guru⁴⁴”.

It is a historical fact that the emperor was not a fanatic votary of Islam. But at the time of his accession of the throne, he needed the support of the orthodox section of the influential Muslim clergy. As a political expediency, he placated the fanatical Muslims, the Naqshbandi revivalists, that he would play a pivotal role as the defender of faith. Sikh religion was becoming popular and it was not only a challenge to Islam, but also a challenge to the state. It was precisely for this reason that after passing the orders of Guru’s execution, he was handed over
to Shaikh Farid Bukhari who was honoured with the title of Murtaza Khan for his loyalty to the throne by repressing the prince’s rebellion. It was not Guru Arjan’s martyrdom which gave “a political turn to the Sikh movement, rather it was a political overtone of the movement which contributed to his martyrdom”. The author of Dabistan provides us useful evidence on the change in the attitude of Mughal Emperor towards the Guru.

The Guru was subjected to tortures by seating him in a cauldron of boiling water and pouring burning sand on his naked person and the most painful torture could be to dip a blistered body in cold water. The historians like Rattan Singh Bhangu in the Prachin Panth Parkash and Sohan Lal Suri in Umdat-ut-Twarikh and Kesar Singh in his Bansavali Nama confirm this punishment. Sohan Lal Suri writes: “Having subjected him to a number of tortures they threw the saint (Guru Arjan) into the river Ravi”. Thus, Guru Arjan became the first martyr at the altar of the Sikh faith.

There may be some truth in the dynastic conspiracy and the vendetta of Chandu Shah, the fact remains that Jahangir regarded the Guru as a challenge to his state as there was a fear that Sikhs might expand their activities and influence under the guidance of Guru Arjan. Thus, Jahangir ordered that he should be put to death with torture.

172
The Guru, despite all the horrible tortures, bore the pain with fortitude accepting it as the will of the Lord: “Whatsoever your will ordains is sweetness to me. All I require is the wealth of God’s name”. Again “under the protection of Parbraham not even a hot wind will blow by me. Brother, with in his protective ring suffering assails me not... the divine protector has protected us all and removed all disease. Says Nanak, through his own grace the Lord is our helper. Guru Arjan Dev was a true martyr who sacrificed his life boldly, and met his fate with fortitude.

V

As regards Guru Tegh Bahadur’s martyrdom, the accounts are more detailed than about Guru Arjan’s. This greater attention to his sacrifice for Dharma is due to the fact that, to quote Fenech, his “martyrdom is interpreted as one of the major events which led to the creation of the Khalsa in 1699, believed to be a watershed in the Sikh history. The pious but bigoted emperor Aurangzeb, who eked out his own living by sacribing copies of the Quran, over-zealous and puritan to the core, had determined to convert this land of infidals into Dar-ul-Islam and directed his provincial governors to stop all forms of song and dance and use every form of coercion to convert Hindus into the
Islamic fold and did not spare even his own co-religionists the Shias and Sufis for their deviation from orthodoxy. The Guru’s extensive tours, his growing popularity and following incensed the emperor especially when he received reports that the Guru extracted money from rural folks. According to William Irvine, the Guru’s crimes in the emperor’s eyes may have been the style of address adopted by his disciples “who had begun to call their leader Sachcha Padshah or the true king”.

J.D. Cunningham also states that the “Sikh Gurus came to talk of themselves and to be regarded by their followers as Sachcha Padshahs” or as ‘veritable kings’ and this invited the ire of the ruling class. Mohammad Qasim in his Ibratnama also refers to Guru Tegh Bahadur having come under the wrath of Aurangzeb to be condemned to death... as he lives in great splendour and his followers claimed sovereignty for him. Even Bhimsen refers that Guru Tegh Bahadur spent his life in splendour and took to the path of rebellion. Guru called himself Padshah and large number of people gathered around him. When Aurangzeb came to know of his activities, he summoned the Guru to the court and he was executed.

The overzealous Iftikhar Khan, the Governor of Kashmir vigorously followed the emperor’s anti-Hindu policies and he
“tyrannized over the Brahmins to such an extent that they approached Guru Tegh Bahadur... and solicited his personal intervention with the emperor. This ultimately led to the Guru's martyrdom⁵⁵”. This account is also supported by Bhatt Vahi Multani Sindhi, Sarup Singh’s Guru Kian Sakhian (No. 25) and Sewa Singh’s Shahid Bilas. The policy of repression was also carried out against Sikhs to curb their religious and political activities, as it was a threat to Islamization policy of Aurangzeb. The Guru was arrested near Ropar and then handed over to Dilawar Khan, Faujdar of Sirhind who detained the Guru for three and half months and sent him to Delhi on November 5, 1675.

Guru Tegh Bahadur was coerced by the Qazi to embrace Islam and was subjected to torture to shake his faith. To instil terror into him, his three companions were killed in the most inhuman way. Bhai Mati Dass was sawn alive; Bhai Dyal Das was boiled alive and Bhai Sati Das was wrapped in cotton and roasted alive. Steadfast and serene, the Guru witnessed the spectacle of his Sikhs courting martyrdom for the sake of their faith. But fear was alien to the Guru who said: “He who fears none nor frighteneth, saith Nanak, he alone is the wise one who knows!”⁵⁶. When he refused to abjure his faith or display any miracle, the Guru was publically executed in the Chandni Chowk at Delhi. Says Ganda Singh: “The picture of Guru Tegh Bahadur
that emerges out in the objective historical setting... is of a true martyr in the cause of *Dharma* and freedom of conscience and conviction\(^57\).

Guru Tegh Bahadur’s life and his martyrdom clearly indicate that the spirit of man is indeed invincible and it also “highlights that external forces may imprison the body but cannot assail the soul of a man who is anchored in God and devoted to the cause of righteousness and freedom\(^58\).” It was indeed a unique event to sacrifice one’s life for others. Guru made a supreme sacrifice for the faith and tenents in which he did not believe and “fought for the right of the people for their freedom of worship\(^59\).”

The martyrdom of Guru Arjan brought a change and the concept of *Miri* and *Piri* was adopted along with the concept of *Sachcha Padshah, raj, takhat, darbar*. It also brought structural changes in Sikh movement and Guru Hargobind wore two swords which represents spiritual-cum-secular authority. This transformed Sikhism into a more militant faith. Guru Teg Bahadur’s sacrifice led to creation of *Khalsa*. It left a profound impact on the people. “The whole Punjab began to burn with indignation\(^60\).” Fauja Singh and G.S.Talib rightly aver that for Guru Tegh Bahadur “the question was not merely of saving the Hindu religion... but of defending *Dharma* in the largest Indian connotation”
Guru Tegh Bahadur’s supreme sacrifice roused the dormant revolutionary spirit of the Sikhs and the Tenth Master produced saint-soldiers who “with one hand on the hilt of the sword and the other on the *mala* (rosary)⁶²” ultimately shook the foundations of the Mughal empire. About the Sikh martyrs Bhagat Lakshman Singh states: The Sikh martyr, by a magic wand, as it were were completely metamorphosed the society and the country that gave them birth. They completely changed the course of events in the times in which they lived, falsifying, the much talked of and much commented upon theory that great men are mere products of their times⁶³.

Thus Guru Tegh Bahadur’s martyrdom was the culmination of the ideology of Guru Nanak. Says Louis Fenech, “It is Guru Tegh Bahadur’s strong insistence on the conquest of fear that is often noted as a loud echo of that same concern in the *bani* of Guru Nanak⁶⁴”. It was primarily for this reason that Bhagat Lakshman Singh hails Guru Tegh Bahadur as “prince of martyrs, whose example it was that permanently inspired most of the *Khalsa* to seek the crown of martyrdom”. The Tenth Master in *Bachitra Natak* hails his father’s noble and heroic deed: “The Lord protected their paste-mark and
sacred thread, and in Kaliyuga performed a mighty deed. To defend the righteous, he spared no sacrifice. Gave away his head, but uttered not a groan. For defending righteousness, he enacted this great deed. Thus the Guru gave a practical demonstration by making sacrifice in order to realize their socio-political and religious aims and set an example for the Sikhs to follow. Noel A King says that never before in Indian history has pure love of death manifested itself so gloriously as in the Sikh history ... Guru Arjan and Tegh Bahadur and their followers made supreme sacrifices for the sake of justice and truth.

VI

Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa to protect Dharma and ensure freedom to every one the way he likes to worship this earth’s water and wind. The Tenth Master played a “providential role to fulfil ... the mission of Nanak... to defend the claims of conscience against external interference.” In his Zafarnama, the epistle of victory, Guru Gobind Singh tells Aurangzeb “when all alternatives have failed, it is lawful to draw the sword from its scabbard. Consequently, all the battles that Guru Gobind Singh fought were Dharma Yudh and all the Sikhs who fell, earned martyrdom.
In *Bachitra Natak*, Guru Gobind Singh recounting the scene of the battle of Bhangani described the valorous deeds of the warriors of both sides and talks of his own men especially his cousin Sango Shah who attained martyrdom. Tradition includes Udai Singh and his brother Bachittar Singh who fought against the Mughal patrol parties. After the evacuation of Anandpur, while crossing the Sirsa in spate, Guru’s forces and family split into two groups. His mother and the two younger sons were taken by his deceitful cook to his village Saheri and later on handed over to the Mughal authorities by the covetous Brahmin and were incarcerated at Sirhind and later on two princes attained martyrdom when they refused to accept Islam and were bricked alive. The other Singhs, forty in number led by the Master reached Chamkaur where they occupied a muddy adobe and fought against the Mughal hordes. Here Guru’s two elder sons Baba Ajit Singh, Baba Jujhar Singh and three of the five Beloved Ones laid down their lives for the protection of faith.

In *Zafarnama*, Guru describes the martyrdom of the elderly princes. He says: “Both of my sons, Ajit and Jujhar gallantly fought and made several fierce onslaughts on the enemy, inflicting deadly gashing wounds, ultimately attained martyrdom at the hands of their slayers, who in turn fell dead in the gory battlefield.” The Guru was
exhorted to escape and fought the battle at Muktsar where the forty immortals sought forgiveness for their early desertion by shedding their blood and became martyrs. Guru Gobind Singh, his sons and Sikhs, laid down their lives to uphold truth and righteousness and set a unique example for the coming generations to suffer and sacrifice for one’s convictions and rights.

Banda Bahadur baptised and blessed by the Tenth Master and accepting the mandate came to Punjab to wreak vengeance on Wazir Khan, the Subedar of Sirhind, responsible for the unjust cruelties perpetrated on the Guru’s family. So furious was the attack and so severe the blow that not even a single brick in Sirhind remained in its place. He established his rule over Punjab and the Khalsa ensign fluttered over its forts and fortresses. Ultimately vanquished and made a prisoner and paraded through the streets of Delhi with his seven hundred and forty-five companions, he courted martyrdom. Chief among them were Baz Singh, Bhai Tara Singh, Bota Singh, Garza Singh, Mehtab Singh, Sukha Singh and the famous Gurbaksh Singh Nihang. Even the young Haqiqat Rai in the train of Banda Bahadur refused to recant on the insistence of his anxious mother and gladly courted martyrdom. Later on, Bhai Taru Singh, Mani Singh, Subeg Singh and Shahbaz Singh showed the same fearlessness, patience and
fortitude of the fifth and ninth Gurus and thus proved true to their faith and always preferred defiance to submission and death to slavery.

In two infamous holocausts known in Sikh annals as Chhota Ghalughara and Vadda Ghalughara thousands of Sikhs courted martyrdom for the Sikh cause. Baba Deep Singh enjoys a place of great veneration in the annals of Sikh faith for his invincible courage, determination and strength. A true saint-soldier who is venerated by every Sikh for upholding the Sikh ideals. Thus the institution of martyrdom welded the Sikhs with a unity of ideals, ethos and practices entirely different from the surrounding society.

In fact, the eighteenth century has been regarded as the most splendid period in Sikh annals. The Sikhs displayed their valour and sacrifice, suffered pain and privation, and yet lost not their faith and mettle. In the post-eighteenth century we have Namdhari martyrs who were blown up by the British guns at Malerkotla in 1870 and then the Kama-gata-maru episode of 1914. The Sikhs had always sacrificed themselves to protect liberty, equality and human rights. They always fought for individual right to speech, freedom of thought and action. They always considered their pious duty to protect the rights of downtrodden, helpless and needy and sacrificed and battled against oppression. The Sikhs revere and remember their martyrs in their daily
prayers. In Sikh religion, martyrdom is not to promote the religion as we have Jehad in Islam but to allow every one the right to worship. It gave the Sikhs a new dynamism and vitality, not found in other communities. Thus martyrdom enjoys a unique status as an institution in Sikh religion.
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