Chapter-IX

KHALSA : A UNIQUE SIKH IDENTITY

Guru Teg Bahadur’s martyrdom at the hands of the Mughal administration gave a rude shock to the Sikh sensibility. His martyrdom was a unique event in the annals of martyrdom, for he suffered a tragic fate, not for his own religion, but for the protection of the Hindu faith. In his martyrdom he brought forth Guru Nanak’s basic conception of “game of love” which demands every kind of sacrifice from the player. Guru Gobind Rai, the Tenth Master of the Sikhs, pondered over the problem and took a step that for ever created for the Sikhs a unique identity and gave them a distinct place in the prevailing Hindu and Muslim ambience.

Guru Gobind Singh took a momentous decision of creating the Khalsa, as he observed that there was challenge to his Sikhs, not only from the hill chieftains, who were idol-worshippers and caste conscious, but also from the Mughal government which was hostile and oppressive towards them. Moreover, he found that his Sikhs lacked courage and valour to challenge the tyrannical rule. Therefore,
messages were sent forth to Sikh sangat all over the sub-continent to assemble at Anandpur on the Baisakhi eve of 1699. They came from all corners of the land, obeying their master’s mandate, and on that fateful Baisakhi day, the Guru held his Durbar at Kesgarh Sahib and proclaimed to the assembled Sikhs that he needed a head. For a moment, death-like silence prevailed. Then arose a brave Sikh who was taken to a tent from which there flowed a drain of blood, then the Guru returned with a blood stained sword and another head was demanded and this went on five times. Afterwards five Sikhs, clad in flowing blue robes, came out and the sight sent thrills of joy amongst the congregation. The Guru baptised them with Amrit, sweetened by sugar-plums added to it by Mata Sahib Kaur and the sweetened water stirred by the Master with a double-edged sword. This amrit the selected five were asked to take from the same bowl and thereby congealed them into a perfect, casteless community – the Khalsa.

They were renamed as Bhai Daya Singh, Bhai Dharam Singh, Bhai Himmat Singh, Bhai Mohkam Singh and Bhai Sahib Singh. The names of the five beloved symbolize the five basic virtues of Sikhs, i.e. Daya; compassion, clemency, Dharam; righteousness, integrity, Himmat; courage, enterprise, Mohkam; resolute, fortitude, Sahib; Lord, Master. The names have lived and proved them as such. Then the
Master ordained the five to ordain him in turn and thus erected an inseparable bond with the Khalsa and he became Guru Gobind Singh.

Guru Nanak took up the task of social reforms and initiated the process of religious transformation. He created the necessary means and institutions so that the common man could resist political and social oppression and social and caste discrimination. He raised the institutions of *langar, sangat* and *dharamsal* and thus tied men together with the bond of the common lease of life. This mission continued for almost two centuries and Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa that marked the culmination of this missionary process. Guru Gobind Singh realized in practice the ideology articulated by the founder of the faith. Guru Nanak also welded the spiritual and the empirical realms of existence. He says: “There can be no love for God without active service in this world”. His motto was: “Truth is high : but higher is truthful living”.

Guru Nanak’s successors followed his tenets with devout adherence and evolved distinct spiritual and practical strategies to realize his vision. Guru Angad and Amar Das stressed the importance of *langar*, while Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan prevailed upon their
devoted followers to settle in Amritsar and start new ventures, business and trade so that they could enhance their status in society. Sikhism played an important role in articulating the aspirations and discontent of social groups of the society, and brought a significant social change in Punjab. “The growth of town-based social elite and a vibrant urban culture are examples of such developments3”. In the rural areas, the trend of upward social mobility was visible when traditional Zamindar castes were displaced by cultivating tenants and peasant proprietors.

Guru Hargobind gave a concrete shape to the creative vision of Guru Nanak. He raised the Akal Takhat and donned two swords of Miri and Piri to give a predominant shape to Guru Nanak’s philosophy of religion as a “game of love” that demands both empirical and spiritual submission to the Master. He brought into practice Guru Nanak’s mission: “Santan manoun dutan danoun4”, i.e. the holy I honour, evil doers I chastize. It was this concept of society, envisioned by Guru Nanak that saw its culmination in the creation of the Khalsa.

This idea of blending the sacred and the profane fully blossomed in the life of the Ninth Master, Guru Tegh Bahadur. It is a historical fact that Aurangzeb had specifically conveyed to Guru Tegh Bahadur that he could help the Guru if he confined his activities to the mere spiritual
sphere and did not dabble into politics. The Guru definitely declined this offer and continued his spiritual-political activities and set before him the great ideals: “fear none, nor drive anyone into fear⁵”. Thus, nine Gurus continuously and consistently pursued their aims and ideals and achieved their objects without turning away from them. They never succumbed before the authorities or compromised with the circumstances and laid down their lives for their cause when required. It was on these injunctions that Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa – the ideal order of soldier-saint to resist tyranny and oppression and protect virtue, to establish Dharma.

Moreover, the Tenth Master had decided to do away with the masand system which had degenerated into selfish and greedy individuals. As Saina Pat, a poet of the Guru’s court testifies, the masands were removed from their services and the Guru established a direct link with his disciples⁶. The Guru issued hukamnamas that the Sikh should have no contact with the masands and come straight to the Guru to offer their respects and offerings. Those who offered defiance and boasted that Guru’s power and prestige were mainly due to their work of preaching and procuring money, were taught a lesson. Thus, the priests were denied the sovereignty of sacred power. The
To realize Guru Nanak’s ideals, the Tenth Master followed the path in tune with the merciless policies of the rulers of the day. He knew that mere pacifism would not deliver the goods and only by matching sword with the sword he could reap justice for the Sikhs of the day. As a unique embodiment of the principle of *Miri* and *Piri*, Guru Gobind Singh took upon him the supreme task of liberating the complex of fear from peoples mind. About the purport of his life, he says:

> I was sent to this world by the Almighty to spread the message of *dharma* and to destroy the wicked. Let all the saintly souls know; this has been my mission since my birth; establish the way of *dharma* and to destroy the evil doers, root and branch.

The Guru launched a *dharma yudh* by blending the *bhakti* and *shakti*. In one of his oft-quoted verses he prayed to his God:

> God grant me one boon... I never waver from the path of righteousness... If I had to fight a battle... I do it without any fear... That I lead my life in your worship and praise... and ... die fighting in the holy war.

There was no ambition to conquer anyone’s territory; to subjugate and humiliate any section of society. He laid down the twin
ideals of *degh* and *tegh* which for the Khalsa represent the Sikh ideal of *miri* and *piri*. In the *Chaupai* he says: “May the cauldron and the sword prevail in the world". Again in *Akal Ustat* he says: “Food for the hungry and sword for the tyranny should go together. That is my wish". This concept of saint-soldier is also elaborated by him in *Krishna Avtar*: “Blessed are they in this world who repeat God’s name with their lips and think of war against evil in their hearts".

The sword was not for aggression but defence and protection. It is precisely for this reason that the Guru sung praises of the sword and equated it with God: “God subdued enemies, so does the sword, therefore, the sword is God, and God is the sword". By connecting the *Khalsa* with the divine, he accorded divine approval to the Sikh struggle for establishing its sovereignty. Guru says: “I bow to the sword and the rapier which destroy evil... In this *Kalyug* and at all times there is great confidence in the powerful arm of the sword". Surjit Hans writes that the “*Vanjara* God of Guru Nanak became in Guru Gobind *Asi-pan, Asi-dhuj*. He also has sword in his hand". Guru says; “When comes the end of life, I die fighting in the thick of a (holy) war".
Guru Gobind Singh in his Zafarnamah accuses Aurangzeb, the ruler of Hind, as the most treacherous person, for his generals took false oath on the Koran and attacked him when he left the fort:

O’Aurangzeb, you are not loyal to your creed. You do not follow the rules of Shariat... You are the master of the world, but you are far removed from true religion.¹⁸

So great was his faith in the Khalsa that the Guru would say:

The Khalsa is the Guru and the Guru is the Khalsa. There is no difference between you and me. As Guru Nanak seated Guru Angad on the thrown, so have I made you also a Guru.¹⁹

Again Guru says:

All the battles I have won against tyranny, I have fought with the devoted backing of these people... Through their grace I have attained all learnings, through their help in battle, I have slain all my enemies.²⁰

The Guru made his Sikhs as immortal soldiers of true dharma and messengers of God and addressed in the words of Hari Ram Gupta “this country’s honour and liberty is entrusted to you by Waheguru. Mix freely with the world, but remain of one soul, one ideal and one aim.”²¹
It is this unflinching faith in the allegiance to the Khalsa to the Guru that becomes a driving force in all the battles Guru Gobind Singh fought for the protection of righteousness and faith against the tyrannous empire. The martyred father’s son knew full well the significance of loyalty. It could not be a mere outer ethical code, but something fully dependent on the love of the followers for their master. This zeal alone could provide a permanent bond between the master and his mates. They were given a place of equality in his scheme of things. Everyone had the right to say his mind. Nothing was hidden, nothing kept under check. The Khalsa and the Guru were one. There was no difference so long as both of them continued to share the same beliefs and thoughts.

In Guru Nanak’s Japuji, one of the stanzas referred to Panch parvan, panch pardhan and by following Guru Nanak, the Tenth Master also attached importance to the numeral five. Dr. Gupta states:

... Guruji sent from Paonta five Sikhs to Kashi to study Sanskrit. He built five forts at Anandpur. He selected five beloved ones at Anandpur. He read five banis while preparing amrit. He administered to each of them five palmfuls of amrit22.

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The Khalsa was enjoined to have five-fold belief in God, Guru Granth, salutation and Guru Nanak’s Japuji. The Singh was obliged to wear five K’s: Kesha, the long, unshorn hair; Kangha or small comb; Kirpan or dagger; Kara, the iron ring, a symbol of the Khalsa and a means of protection in the battle; and Kachha or a pair of knickerbockers. The observance of these provided a sense of fraternity and equality to its members. It was a kind of natural military attire, the least expensive and the most viable.

It strengthened the inner unity of the faith along with outer appearance. It helped the Sikhs to inculcate the qualities of head and heart, a strong body with a sound mind, determined, valiant, faithful and true to its convictions. It brought a common bond of union among them and gave them a new lease of life and provided a fresh line of action. Thus, it provided a strong foundation which helped it to protect and sustain them during the course of their struggle.

The Khalsa were expected to take five vows. They were: not to shave the hair, not to smoke, not to eat halal, the meat of the animal killed by the Muslim style; not to wear a cap; and not to worship tombs, graves and relics. In one of his swaiyas, Guru Gobind Singh thus defines the Khalsa:
Day and night he meditated on the ever-radiant Light, and giveth not even a moment’s thought (to anything else) except the One Lord. Adorneth himself with perfect love and faith and pulleth not his trust in fasts, tombs, crematoriums and hermit-cell even by mistake. In pilgrimages, in charities, in acts of mercy, in austerities and in self-restraints knoweth none save Him. When full light showeth within him, then a man may be deemed pure Khalsa. Guru freed the people from the age-old rituals, customs, ceremonies, casteism and priest dominance. New society was evolved which was free from taboos, which gave new outlook, provided new ethos, motivations and ideals. Thus he made religion simple, pure and crystal clear.

Similarly, Guru Gobind Singh declared the five deliverances for his disciples: *Dharam Nash* or freedom from previous religious practices and customs; *Karam Nash* – the obliteration of past deeds; *Kul Nash* – freedom from castes, clans and race; *Sharam Nash* – disappearance of hereditary professional distinctions and *Bharam Nash* – discarding the ritualism of the past. It clearly shows that Guru broke himself and his Sikhs from the prevalent customs, religious systems, traditions and gave Khalsa a distinct and unique outlook.

Since these principles of conduct, practice and behaviour were inviolable, the Khalsa was congealed into a perfect, coherent, social
and political order. He envisioned *Khalsa* to be physically stout, mentally agile and religiously pious. It emerged as the unique identity that had nothing to do with the prevailing chaotic conditions of the broken Hindu social order. Once for all, the Sikhs attained a unique identity and could never be identified with other communities of India. Moreover, since the Khalsa believed in the power of the Almighty alone, and apart from the Guru, owed allegiance to none, the seeds of nationhood were sown in a firm but rich soil. Thus, Guru awakened the spiritual consciousness which binds together the human race and laid the foundation of national unity by evolving spiritual democracy and restructured the society on egalitarian basis. “His aim was to go beyond the position of Hargobind and to establish a parallel government”. He infused political consciousness and “added the sentiment of nationalism to religion”. He created new parameters for the political system and aimed at the establishment of an ideal state, which should be governed by the norms provided by the *Gurbani*. The Sikhs saw themselves at the height of their glory during the assault of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur and later on during the hay days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
In the words of Koer Singh, when the Tenth Master had baptised
the five beloved ones, he thus addressed them to baptise him in turn:

Hear, Khalsa Ji, with all attention, you are
dearest of dear to me... The sovereignty of the
whole world is given to you, the Khalsa. I have
made you leaders of the Khalsa, the way you
received amrit (baptism) from the Guru, I wish
to receive it the same way from you. The Guru
and the Sikh are interwoven with one another.
It had been so recognized by the nine Gurus.
The Sikh and the Guru are related to each other
as head is to the body26.

Thus, the religious faith of the Sikhs was channelized into
achieving a political freedom and the Khalsa helped them to capture
political power for the plebian objectives. Their hopes and aspirations
were fulfilled. The down-trodden were given a clear injunction to
capture the political power in their own hands.

Jagjit Singh rightly avers that the “Sikh movement had not only a
plebian political mission, but it had also a plebian base”, and it was
necessary that “the downtrodden castes and classes should be both
the architect and masters of their own destiny27”. The lowest classes
became equal with the highest. They all became one. “The beloved
five who had offered their head to his flashing sword on the initiation
day were not drawn from the elite but from the different stratified Varnas or castes. The Sikh portals were wide open to all - the disinherited and the dispossessed of the world\textsuperscript{28}. Rattan Singh Bhangu refers to the plebian composition of the Khalsa at several places, when the Taruna Dal wing of the Khalsa Dal was re-organized into five divisions, one of the divisions was under the command of Bir Singh Rangretta. In the battle with Abdali, known as Wada Ghalu Ghara, a special mention is made of Ramdasias and Rangrettas who took a prominent part in the field. Says Jagjit Singh, “The egalitarian political aims of the Sikh movement are also brought out by the negative evidence that it was not sectarian or based on clannish, tribal, feudal or dynastic loyalties and ambitions\textsuperscript{29}.

Guru Gobind Singh’s first battle of Bhangani is a sure proof that his followers were not only the Sikhs, but even devout Muslims like Buddhu Shah who sacrificed his sons for the cause of the Guru. The Guru was not against the individuals but against a corrupt and tyrannous system. Everyone has the right to worship his Lord the way he likes. It was this kind of freedom that the Khalsa wanted to achieve for every individual. Therefore, the fight of the Khalsa was against those who used their men and machines to coerce others to accept their faith and mode of worship. It was indeed a new kind of
revolution, for it provided the ordinary menial the power to hoist the head of an emperor on its stake. It provided an ideology, a living basis to each member of the community and perhaps did more than the French Revolution or the Communist Movement in the west.

The creation of the Khalsa thus released a new dynamic force into the arena of Indian history. The “Guru achieved the pinnacle of the social, cultural and political outlook of the people, but also gave to the Sikhs a new social and political philosophy by inspiring them with courage, love of freedom and an indomitable will to fight for their higher ideals” which altogether changed “the destiny of the Sikhs” as well as “the course of Indian history”. The Sikh was expected to combine in him the virtues of a saint and the strength and sternness of a soldier. With the creation of the Khalsa the Guru has given us “the ideal person (Khalsa as an individual self) and the ideal social structure (Khalsa Panth) in micro-cosmic form”. Irvine brings home this truth about the plebian base of the movement most succinctly when he says that “A low scavenger or leather worker, the lowest of the low in Indian estimation, had only to leave home and join the Guru (Banda), when in a short span of time he would return to his birth place as its ruler, with his order of appointment in his hand”. In fact, Guru re-established their lost dignity and their manhood and helped them to re-
assert their power and glory. It clearly reveals the revolutionary change brought out by the social philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh.

It is difficult to influence the crowd of a revolution until its reasons are not “transformed into sentiments” says Le Bon Gustavs. This is what Guru Gobind Singh did. He founded the Khalsa by initiating the solemn ceremony of baptism which involved not only the ceremony of taking elixir from the bowl but also the vows and oaths by way of commitment. In this way the revolution was a beginning and led to an era of total transformation of the Sikh psyche. Every Sikh was given a name that ended with “Singh” and every female name ended with the suffix “Kaur”. They were born afresh to look at life and its beauties with clearly-opened, perceptive eyes and to remain for ever ready to encounter the ferocious elements bent on curbing the rights of others to their religious whim.

The Guru’s insistence on the outer discipline that he enjoined upon Sikhs is a symbol of his far-sightedness. The Guru believed that outward discipline was essential to maintain inner strength and vitality and whosoever deviated from the ordained code shall not be deemed as the true Khalsa. As standard-bearer of truth, righteousness, justice and equality, members of the Khalsa fraternity were filled with rare zeal and their faith in the Guru and the self-confidence he had filled in
them, changed the entire history of the sub-continent. Every member of the Khalsa was expected to be ever ready to strike sword with the oppressor, the tyrant, the military adventurist. J.D. Cunningham rightly avers that “Guru Gobind Singh transformed his followers into brave fighters who possessed so much strength and courage that they could dare in lions in their own dens and challenged dreadful Aurangzeb in his court34”.

The Guru gave a new meaning to the age-old concept of liberation or *mukti*. The Guru injected the *Khalsa* spirit which has totally annihilated the fear of death in the minds of his followers. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon rightly states: “The Sikh who died in the cause of righteousness was looked upon as a *Mukta* (a liberated soul)” and further states that for the Sikhs *Mukti* is not release from the world but liberation from its fear35. Dhillon rejects J.N. Sarkar’s contention that Guru Gobind Singh organized “the Sikhs to suit a special purpose” and converted “the spiritual unity of the Sikhs into a means of worldly success... and instrument of political advancement36”.

In fact, dying in the battle is considered by the Sikhs a means of salvation (*Mukti*). The Guru had declared in no uncertain terms that the role of the Khalsa was to protect the individual and social dignity and
defend righteousness at all costs. It was a well integrated system that embraced every aspect of human life – social, political and religious and thus institutionalized the system. Cunningham writes, “Guru effectually roused the dormant energies of a vanquished people, and filled them with a lofty, although fitful longing for social freedom and national ascendancy, the proper, adjuncts of that purity of worship which had been preached by Nanak. Gobind saw what was yet vital, and he relumed it with Promethean fire37”.

Thus, the birth of the Khalsa was indeed a unique event, for it rudely shook the caste-ridden Hindu fold. The Sikhs acquired an identity of their own altogether distinct from other communities of the sub-continent. At the time of his departure for the next fold, the Tenth Master gave Guru-Gadi to Guru Granth Sahib and temporal authority to the Khalsa. Guru-Panth emerged as an entity to guide the Sikh affairs in all times to come. The creation of the Khalsa, therefore, cannot be understood in any other sense than the awakening of the conscience and directing it towards a conscious goal – to strive, protect and maintain righteousness at all costs.
REFERENCES


2. Ibid., Sri Raga, Mohalla 1, p. 62.


5. Ibid., Salokas, Mohalla 9, p. 1427.


17 Gobind Singh, Guru, *Chaubis Avtar*, Dohira 2488, in *Thus Spake the Tenth Master*, p. 125.


37 Cunningham, J.D. *History of the Sikhs*, Op. Cit., p. 75