CHAPTER II

CONCEPT AND TRADITION OF MARTYRDOM IN SIKHISM
The word martyr is derived from the Greek word \textit{uaptup} or \textit{uaptus}, which means "witness". A martyr is one who bears witness. It implies a great sacrifice by one for sticking to his ideology. A martyr is "one who suffers persecution for his faith, martyrdom: to undergo torture or death for religious convictions."\(^1\) "A person who chooses to suffer or die rather than give up his faith or his principles, person tortured or killed because of his belief."\(^2\) A martyr voluntarily suffers death rather than deny his religion by words or deeds.

The word 'martyr' was first used by the Greeks. They were greatly influenced by the sufferings and sacrifices of the Jewish people at the cruel hands of Egyptians, Babylonians and the word martyr was used for people, who suffered sacrifices.

To start with Christianity, the word martyr "... meaning literally witness and often used in that sense in the new testament e.g. during the conflict between paganism and Christianity when many Christians "testified" to the truth of their convictions by sacrificing their lives, the word assumed its modern technical sense."\(^3\) It was employed by Christians to describe one who is witness to the truth and then
particularly one who gives evidence of the truth by dying and so be a martyr. "In the NT it is used chiefly of those who testify what they have seen and heard concerning Jesus. Since loyalty in this testimony often incurred violent treatment the word came ultimately to mean one who was put to death for the sake of gospel."  

In Christianity the word martyr is originally referred to the Apostles as witness of Christ's life and resurrection. Then the word martyr was used for persons who bore witness to their faith by suffering death. St. Stephen was the first Christian martyr of this type as mentioned in the New Testament. After the death of St. Stephen, thousands of Christians were persecuted in the Roman Empire in early three centuries of the Christianity, for not worshipping the Roman Gods. Execution, physical torture and death continued for a lot of Christians till the time Christianity became the official religion of Rome. St. Paul and St. Peter are two well-known examples who died due to Roman persecution. "The tradition of martyrdom has entered deep into the Christianity consciousness. The faith centres about one who was executed as an alleged threat to the established order and throughout its course it had been punctuated by forcible attempts to curb it."  

"The Roman Catholic Church officially consider
as martyrs only those who died for their faith before or during the Roman persecutions in the 2d and 3d centuries, such as Stephen, the first martyr. It regards martyrs as saints and requires every church altar to contain some of their relics. Non-Catholic are more flexible to extend the term martyr to all those who were killed for matters of faith or belief. "In this sense a martyr of antiquity was Socrates. The period of religious struggle in early modern times added such names as those of Hus, Saronarola, Bruno, Servetus, and Cranmer to the list of those generally termed martyr."

In Christianity, martyrs are supposed to enjoy special privileges. According to Christian belief martyrs at once pass to the full enjoyment of Heaven, for which others have to wait until the day of judgement. "The Christians of all denominations hold that the martyrs are "athletes of God contending for heavenly prize". A martyr's passion and death are considered as analogous to the passion and death of Christ, who has always been regarded as the archetypal martyr, particularly because of the continuing influence of the crucifixion over the millennia and in the line countless millions, and the global and universal significance this great event acquired."

In Islam, "The Arabic word for "martyr" in the Quran, and in Muslim theology is shahid
Pl. shuhūd, or shahid, Pl. shuhada, the literal meaning of which is "present as witness". It is with this meaning that the word martyr, is often used in the Quran. It frequently occurs as referring to God e.g.:–

Thou was the watcher over them,
Thou art witness over all things. Or

"Say, people of the scripture why disbelieve ye in the revelation of Allah, when Allah (Himself) is witness ye do." The word martyr did not exactly mean martyr.

"Doubtless this is a pure Arabic, but its application to one who witness for his faith by the sacrifice of his life was derived from its use among Christians (the Syriac sahda, which is the invariable equivalent of the New Testament uaptus). This turn of meaning is certainly post-koranic, for in the Koran itself Shuhada, ... does not mean exactly martyr, but confessors, i.e. those who testify for God and prophet. It is only later commentators that have tried to find the recent meaning of word martyr in such verses:

"Don't say that those who are slain in the cause of Allah are dead, they are alive, although you are not aware of it."
"The Christian influence, through which the meaning of the word shahid was extended from 'witness' and 'confessor' to 'martyr', made itself felt at a later date, and then the latter meaning soon became very general. But it is remarkable that the meaning of the word shahid received an extension which is scarcely to be reconciled with the tendency of Islam."16 "The development of meaning of shahid to martyr (there is not the parallel development in shahid; this never means anything but witness, namely in a court of justice,...) took place under Christian influence, c.f. the Syriac sahda for the N.T. Greek uaptus."17

Thus in Islam the meaning of shahid is to get killed in the way of God - to give witness. "A perfect martyr, or ash-shahidu'L-Kamil, is one who has either been slain in a religious war, or who has been killed unjustly."18 In Quran it is said, "... "If you have suffered from a wound, so did the enemy. We alternate these vicissitudes among mankind so that Allah may know the true believers and choose martyrs from among you for He does not love the evil doers and that He may purify the faithful from the sin and annihilate the infidels."19

The earliest application of the term traditionally, is to those who were killed fighting in the Prophet's side in the battle of Badr, about which Quran says that
the Allah shot the arrows that brought the victory. Imam Hussain grandson of Prophet Mohammad is one of the early shahids who fell on the battlefield of Karbala while fighting with unbelievers.

Not only those who are killed for their religious faith or unjustly are regarded martyrs, but Muhammedan Law, also regards them as martyrs who die while exciting the compassion and pity of others. "Seven other causes of death are enumerated which make the sufferers worthy of the honourable title of a shahid, and these are mainly calamitous or pathological causes, which have nothing to do with voluntary self sacrifice for a great cause. In later times other causes have been added to these seven. He who dies in defence of his possessions, or far from a high mountain, he who is torn to pieces by wild beasts, and many more, are to be counted in the category of shuhada." And all the persons who died in such manner as to excite the sympathy and pity of mankind were given the rank of shahid, only in figurative sense.

In India, the term shahid came to be applied to the Muslim ghazis, soldiers, sufis and others who died in the battlefield fighting against the infidels.

In Islam, martyrs are given high place and are rewarded in the Heaven. Some
hold that they do not require to be washed and shrouded before burial, but should be buried with their wounds apparent. A special blessing is promised to those who died in Jihad. In Quran it is said:

"You must not think those who were slain in the cause of Allah are dead. They are alive, and well provided for by their lords." 21

"While the concept of martyrdom and the term 'martyr' continued to be the integral part of Christian and Muslim religious traditions, it did not seem to have any impact on the Indian mind as a whole." 22

There is no word or term in Hindu literature which corresponds completely with the word martyr. The words like Deh-Tayaga 23 or 'Sankalpa' 24 which means will or vow to achieve purpose or aim are commonly used for sacrifice. But the real spiritual struggle and sacrifice which the term martyr reflects in both Christianity and Islam is missing in these Sanskrit phrases. Although the people died fighting against tyranny and evil by undertaking self-purification or will to resist tyranny through Sankalpa in ancient India, the real concept of martyrdom was not known. "It is an interesting fact to know that the concept of martyrdom was foreign to Indian culture before the martyrdom of Guru Arjun." 25

Sikhism has adopted the word 'shahid' from Islam, "one of the major reasons of doing this was
the indepth tendency of Sikhism from its very inception to chalk out a line of orientation for itself away from Brahmanical orthodoxy and other forms of expression of the religious ideas current among sects which were rooted in Hinduism, however, for they might in course of time have strayed from its central path and adopted an eclectic attitude towards Islam, thereby giving occasion to the urges to adopt such Muslim concepts and terms entered into the popular vocabulary of the people. In Sikhism martyr means witness or a person who sacrifices his life in religious war.

Guru Nanak and Bhagat Ravidas used the word Shahid in Adi Granth. Guru Nanak used Shahid in the following verses:

"The spiritual guides, prophets, divine pioneers, men of faith, good men, martyrs, preachers, strivers, judges, moulvies and saints and the reachers of Lord's court..."

Adi Granth, p. 53

Bhagat Ravidas used the word martyr:-

"He, in whose family, men used to kill cows at the Id and Bakrid and worshipped Shaikhs, martyrs and spiritual perceptions."

Adi Granth, p. 1293
Bhai Gurdas used the term Shahid four times in his composition.

In Sikh religion the idea of martyrdom is originated with the birth of Sikhism. "... Since the time when Guru Nanak preached the worship of the Eternal Unborn, Formless God and the supremacy of a pure life over rituals and creeds ... the terms of the later manifestation of heroism and armed resistance were present in the original ideals which Guru Nanak enunciated and preached."31

Thus Guru Nanak who preached the divine message of Love and Truth, also made people aware of political suppression and tyranny of the rulers. Like when he condemned the political situation of the country:

"The Kings are tigers and the courtiers dogs, they go and (harass) or (awaken) the sitting and the sleeping ones. The King's servants inflict wound with their nails. The King's curs lick up the blood and bile of the poor subjects. Where, in the Lord's Court, the men are to be assayed. The noses of these unturstworthy ones shall be chopped off."32

Adi Granth, p. 1288

Guru Nanak knew that there was evil and tyranny. Man had to bring end to this situation. If need be
man should take on himself suffering or torture. And God will always help the righteous. It is the duty of a man to die for a good cause. Guru Nanak rightly remarks:-

"If one knows how to die, O people, then, call not death bad. Fruitful is the dying of the brave persons, who are approved before their death. Hereafter, they alone are acclaimed as warriors, who receive true honour in the Lord's court." 33

Adi Granth, pp. 579-80

From the very beginning, Guru Nanak Dev made it absolutely clear to his followers that the path of Sikhism was hazardous. It was difficult to follow the path of Sikhism because it required if necessary, sacrificing, one's life. He advised his followers not to refrain lying down one's life:-

"If thou yearnest to play of love with me, then come thou in my lane, placing their head on the palm of thy hand. Put thou thy feet on this road. Lay down thou thy head and mind not public opinion." 34

Adi Granth, p. 1412

From the above verses, it is clear that Guru Nanak gave the idea to die for one's faith or religion but only in theoretical sense. It can be concluded that later on this very idea of sacrificing one's life
for truth developed the concept of martyrdom in Sikhism. "In the Sikh religious thought only the ultimate triumph of good is assured after long travail and suffering and self sacrifice on the part of the good and the holy. This is what introduces into Sikh thought the idea of martyrdom as the means toward reassertion of good."35

After studying the political, social and religious conditions of fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (discussed in the chapter fourth), it is assumed that the idea of martyrdom in Sikhism emerged as a reaction and challenge to the suppression and tyranny of the rulers.

This very idea of sacrifice as preached by Guru Nanak Dev had assumed the practical shape when fifth Guru Arjun Dev laid down his life for Sikh faith and beliefs rather he refused to abandon his was religion. The term Shahid/ first applied to Guru Arjun Dev. The second martyr in Sikhism was/Ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur, who sacrificed his life for upholding the right of the people for freedom of conscience and worship.

The two Gurus suffered martyrdom but such a great sacrifices failed to bring the desired effect and result. Then"Guru Gobind Singh thought that the supreme sacrifices made by Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur had failed to move the conscience of the
stone-hearted Mughal Emperors and the ruthless campaign of converting or killing the non-Muslims continued unabated. He, therefore, decided to take up arms in order to meet force by force because he considered that to submit before the aggressor was sinful. "Then Guru Gobind Singh sanctioned the use of sword to fight against the oppression, it is clear from his own writings in Zafarnama i.e. when all other peaceful means fail to end the tyranny and evil. It is right to take a sword and fight for freedom for all." The creation of Khalsa transferred the Sikhs into saint soldiers. "The Khalsa in 1699 passed the acid test - the readiness to die for their faith. According to Guru Gobind Singh, the noblest death is one on the field of battle, fighting for freedom and or for any worthy cause." This idea of Guru Gobind Singh further developed the concept of martyrdom and extented the meaning of term shahid, now to the person who died in the battlefield while defending his faith. Such a person is also considered to be a martyr.

So, the idea of crusader went a long way to develop concept of martyrdom. A Sikh is a crusader in the real sense as he sacrifices his life for the cause of truth. "Thus martyrdom in Sikhism is not self-extinction it is on the other hand a sort of affirmation in the faith the martyr holds and a
positive projection of the urge of the martyr to uphold virtue and to resist evil.\textsuperscript{39}

From the early eighteenth century, the persons who died for political ideals were also considered to be martyrs. For example Banda Bahadur and his companions who were executed at Delhi and the Sikhs who were killed during the rule of various governors - Zakariya Khan, Mir Mannu, Yahyya Khan, Shah Nawaz and during the invasions of Ahmed Shah Abdali, whether for religious or political causes are claimed to be martyrs by the Sikhs.

From religious independence to political sovereignty the attention of the Sikhs for struggle was drawn to other aspects of life. "As we move towards the close of eighteenth century and after, the term 'shahid' began to be used on wider scale and in a rough manner, it overstepped its earlier religious associations to cover all who made the supreme sacrifice in pursuit of some socially approved ideal. These days, as social consciousness has grown and the traditions of struggle against entrenched authority and privilege had taken deeper and deeper roots, any kind of sacrifice, voluntary or involuntary has indiscriminately been described as Sahidi - martyrdom.\textsuperscript{40} In eighteenth century, martyrdom had become a tradition. Such was the force to fight against injustice and evil that Sikhs gave sacrifices one after the other.

Thus the idea of martyrdom in Sikhism, which
was started only in theory by Guru Nanak by revolutionising the Hindu society and awakening the spirit of religious freedom in the masses continued with all its fervour and gained strength with the passage of time, in the face of suppression and opposition, persecution to reach at such a stage that it touched the very spirit of Sikhs. And brought under its fold such aspects as sacrificing the life not only for religious causes but also for political, social and economic virtues. "It is a matter of great pride for Sikh community that, at the altar of faith, it has the largest number of martyrdoms to its credit. The spirit of martyrdom for faith flows in the veins of Sikhs, and when transferred to other fields, it works with equal zeal and fervour." Such was the growth and development of the concept of martyrdom in Sikhism.

Though the spirit of martyrdom has established its firm roots in Sikhism. Every person who suffers death is not a martyr. To be a perfect martyr, one should possess some qualities.

These qualities have been described by Bhai Gurdas, a brilliant scholar and poet of Sikhism, as back as in sixteenth century. According to Bhai Gurdas a shahid is one that cultivated the qualities of patience as well as fearlessness, fortitude and valour. He says that martyr is a person who has unshakeable faith in God.
A perfect martyr always gives his life for a big cause or a high ideal. He gives his life, because a martyr's life is an ideal for others. His very spirit of life blossoms. As in Sikh philosophy, the real man is not the physical body, but the soul in him, which is not perishable and is without any fear:

"The soul dies not, nor can it be slain. The Lord creates and cares for all. Through the Name is realised His will." 43

_Adi Granth_, pp. 1026

Again:

"Man weeps saying, He was mine, O mine. This soul is not perishable." 44

_Adi Granth_, p. 188

In Sikh religion the aim of a life is to become one with the Supreme Soul i.e. God. By sacrificing one's life for the protection of religion, betterment of human beings, soul becomes one with the supreme soul:

Kabir says:

"Kabir, death which the world dreads, gives joy to my mind. It is by death alone, that one is blessed with the perfect supreme bless." 45

_Adi Granth_, p. 1365
Sacrifice for selfish purpose or cause has no place in Sikhism. A martyr should feel pride in sacrificing his life and achieve martyrdom for righteous or selfless cause. About it Guru Gobind Singh remarks:

"Give me this power, O Almighty, From righteous deeds I may never refrain. Fearlessly may I fight all battles of life, Full confidence may I ever have in asserting my battles, when the mortal life comes to a close, May I die with the joy and courage of a Martyr." 46

A martyr should possess the qualities of detachment from worldly things. A person who loves money, lives for his own self. Attachment with worldly comforts causes pain, when these are separated from a person. So firstly, a person should be free from the love of worldly pleasures. Guru Nanak says:—

"The mortal who renounces mineness, avarice, worldly attachment and self-conceit. Says Nanak, he himself is saved and saves others as well." 47

Adi Granth, p. 1427
Only that person can sacrifice his life, who has no fear of death. The fear of death is greatest of all. Only God is fearless. Fearlessness can be achieved by becoming one with God:-

"In the darkage God's Name is the destroyer of dread and the banisher of evil-intellect. Night and day, whosoever utter the Name, O Nanak, his tasks are accomplished." 48

_Adi Granth_, p. 1427

Those who meditate on God attain fearlessness. Meditation brings faith in God and a person reaches a stage, when he forgets himself and thinks that God has sent him in this world to do what he feels:-

"Accept thou death first, abandon the hope of life." 49

_Adi Granth_, p. 1102

Only a person having above mentioned qualities really knows what is better death:-

"Kabir the world is passing away and everyone dies in the end, but none knows how to die. He who dies such a death of remaining dead in life, dies not again." 50
Again, true warrior is/who dies for his religion:

"The battle-drum beats in the mind's sky, aim is taken and the wound is inflicted. They, who are the warriors, enter the battle-field. Now is the time to combat. He alone is known to be a warrior, who fights for the sake of his religion. He dies cut piece by piece, but deserts not the battle-field ever."^{51}

Adi Granth, p. 1105

So after discussing the qualities of martyr, it can be said, "To be a martyr in the real sense, one should be a living martyr first otherwise the effects of martyrdom, would not be found enduring. The living martyr has to remove first the obstacles, the first is fear of death and second is sense of egoism.. The first obstacle, fear of death can be removed by (Simrin) meditation or Name which can change death into immortality. The second obstacle, the sense of egoism can be removed by Nam Simrin which changes the ego into the Divine Will. Thus, in Sikhism living martyr becomes a real martyr who will give his life for the sake of lofty ideal, freedom and welfare of all others."^{52}

No wonder such rare persons are shown all respect by men from all walks of life in Sikhism. The Shahid has a special place in the prayers of the Sikhs
and they daily remember them.  

The Sikhs have adopted two ways of receiving martyrdom:

i) Peaceful martyrdom

ii) Armed martyrdom.

In the first type of martyrdom a martyr submits to all sorts of tortures and atrocities and is finally put to death. Guru Arjun Dev, Bhai Mani Singh etc. met this type of martyrdom.

In the armed martyrdom a martyr does not remain peaceful. He carries the arms and fights with the oppressors in the battle-field and dies fighting. This method is usually adopted when the first fails.

In both types of martyrdom suffering and death is the fate of the Shahid.

STATE AND MARTYR

Now the question arises why martyrdom occurred?

History is full of examples when a person sacrificed his life for one cause or the other. Man is born free. Freedom is his birth right. He has the right to live as he wishes. Whenever a man is forced to feel that he is not free, he wants to become free and he starts to make efforts. He does not feel satisfied with anything other than freedom. This right to
freedom is of many types as religious, social, political and economic. From the above mentioned ones, the religious freedom is the most essential as it is the freedom of conscience. While demanding the rights, men may be arrested, jailed, tortured and in the end put to death. Such people have different views, faiths and ideologies than those held by the state. The men in power do not tolerate the existence of such type of people. This clash of interests results in sacrifice, that is martyrdom. "In a world wherein aggressors and tyrants have always tried to impose their own foul designs on others, so as to deflect them from the path held by the latter to be right, the situation for the enactment of the high tragedy of martyrdom has been constantly recurring." 55

Martyrs are not common, they are rare people who adopt the path of martyrdom when all other means fail to impress the authorities.

It can be assumed, in the end, that a martyr is a person who sacrifices his life for his faith. A martyr should not die for personal gains but die for the betterment of others.

The concept of martyrdom is different in Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. In Christianity – a person suffers death than renounce his religion thus bearing witness to the truth by surrendering his life.
In Islam, a martyr is reckoned as one killed in *Jihad* against unbelievers. Martyrdom in Sikhism is more than martyrdom in other religions. Because, in Sikhism, a person sacrifices himself not only for the sake of religion but also for principles and ideals.

In Christianity and Sikhism, the idea of martyrdom emerged as the government in power tried to suppress their religion, but in Islam the idea originated as the Muslims expand their religion on foreign lands. In Christianity and Islam special privileges are assured to a martyr but a Sikh martyr has never been given assurance of any special privilege.
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6. Ibid., Act 1, 6:7.
8. Merit Student's Encyclopaedia, Vol. 11, p. 578.
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13. Ibid., Sura III, 98.
15. Quran, Sura ii, 154.


19. *Quran Sura iii.*, 141.


25. Darshan Singh, Dr., *Indian Bhakti Traditions and Sikh Gurus*, p. 212.


28. भी दही करा गरमि गरमि युक्त अत्ति गरी।

कै प्राजिङ्ग भरतीयतार टिपक दक्षे दानी।

मृत्यु १, आर्टि ५३

29. ते दृष्टि देखि खरी देखि युक्त बदू बेखुब

शकृत भरतीयतार कै पौरी पीठै।

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30. 3(18/2), 8(8/3), 21 (13/2), 40(8/2)

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ਪਲਾਲ ਤਕਤ ਪੁਸਤਕ ਧਾਰਨਿਆ।।
ਦੁਨੀਆ ਨਧੀ ਖਿੱਚੇ ਬੱਧ ਨਵਣ।।
ਕੁਛੇ ਸੀ ਜਾਂ ਕੇਦਰ ਪ੍ਰਤਾਰ।।
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34. ਸੀ ਜੁਡੀ ਵਜੋਂ ਵੇਹ ਬਹਦੁਆਲਾ ਹੁੰਦੀ।।
ਚਨਦੁ ਕਾਹਤ ਝੁੜੀ ਬਹਦੁਆਲਾ ਮੰਨਾ।।
ਚਨਦੁ ਮਨਾ ਜਾਤ ਪੈ ਜਾਣਾ।।
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37. "..." (Punjabi text).

38. Gobind Singh Mansukhani, Dr., Aspects of Sikhism, p. 64.


40. Ibid., p. 462.


42. "..." (Punjabi text).
43. तो नीले सब से तारिखिया नहीं वाइट हेड़े
पुस्तिकाकथा ही है।

44. भेंत में इतिहास विश्वास की।
कारण जिस नींद तव ठहरी।

45. जबीब निमू अब हे हम गुण तवे
मेरे इत आहिए।
अब हे जी हे वर्चु युक्त विमाली।

46. जोड़ विश्व में ग्रेन विश्व में
वृद्ध विश्व हे अंधू तवे।

उद्व: विश्व हे अंधू तवे,
विश्व विश्व हे अंधू तवे।
अंधू विश्व हे अंधू तवे,
विश्व विश्व हे अंधू तवे।

उद्व: विश्व हे अंधू तवे,
47. ते पृथ्वी भक्ति उन्हें देखा रहो अभिलंग।
वसु तरसा आभुर उसे अभिकुल देख दिखाए।
अवधार 1,
आदर नीति पृ. 1427

48. है करंगल हनुमानजी कल कविता में उनकी दर्शनी।
निमनात्र ने सरकल जो समक देंगा निसर्ग अरमा।
अवधार 1,
आदर नीति पृ. 1427

49. परिणाम बहुत अपुर्णता सी है की हिंद अरमा।
अवधार 5,
आदर नीति पृ. 1102

50. अग्निभीत भवन बहुत तू तू भाव भरिवि ती साहि देवि।
कोसी नवनी जै भई भयुयि त मकर वेदि।
जेब वशील, आदर नीति पृ. 555

51. जब रमोगर शरिर सर्वेशर सर्विति तीमद्र आउ।
केशु न मरिज मूकां अध मुक्ति हे प्रहु।
मूक ते परिचिती ने लौ सोइ लें ते हुआ।
पुल्लु योग गोइ है अयु त धार ने। -आदर नीति, Sikka, 1185

52. Ajit Singh, /Dr., Becons of Light,
p. 84.
53. पैली विज्ञान, इति सरिकित लिखि,

प्राणियों का विज्ञान, ची में, सही में, अग्नि में पिलाने
ठाम लीरिया, डैर कुलाह, देख चलानी, देख अन्नी,
अर्धे अर्धित तीतर, विज्ञान विज्ञानियों,
सिकंदरियों के समान यह विधान यह देख,
कैँड भरना नी, कैँड टारकुल।

54. Pritam Singh Gill, Guru Tejah Bahadur - A
Unique Martyr, p. 35.

55. Gurbachan Singh Talib (ed.), Guru Tejah
Bahadur - Background and Supreme
Sacrifice, p. 174.