

Guru Gobind Singh: A Humanitarian of Medieval Times

(In the context of Islam and Muslims)

Dr.Mohd. Habib*

* Dr. Mohd. Habib, Guru Gobind Singh Dept. of Religious Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala.
email drmohdhabib@yahoo.com mobile: 9888578143

Vol. 1 No. 7

This article is from *Sikh Research Journal*, the online peer-reviewed journal of Sikh Studies and Punjabi Language Studies. *

Sikh Research Journal *vol. 1. no. 7. Published: November 2016.

<http://www.sikhfoundation.org/sikh-research-journal/>

During 1666 AD the ninth Guru , Guru Teg Bahdur was travelling east of Patna to the regions of Bihar, Assam after leaving his wife, family members and Sikh Sangat at Patna, Bihar. In fact, he was on the mission to spread the words of Guru Nanak to the whole of India. Therefore, he took his family and other Sikhs along with him including his wife Mata Gujri who was expecting a baby. It was difficult for Mata Gujri to continue or due to some other reasons she was halted at Patna with some other Sikhs and Guru Teg Bahdur moves on his journey as per his schedule. In this period of her stay in 1666 AD, Mata Gujri ji became the mother of a prince named as Gobind Rai. Thus, Gobind Rai who was anointed later on as Guru Gobind Singh the tenth master of Sikh Panth was born in the city of Patna in Bihar. The city now known as Patna Sahib in the memory of the strong Humanitarian Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh ji.

The history shows that before Guru Teg Bahadur, Guru Nanak, the first Guru visited this place on his way to the holy land Gaya, the place where Buddha was enlightened. Guru Nanak was aware of the importance of Pataliputra. At that time he was spreading the message of unity of God and unity of mankind to create the unity and equality among the people of various sects and casts. In this period he met Salis Rai Johri, a great devotee of him. He was so influenced by Guru Nanak's teachings that he changed his huge house into a Dharamsala. It is said that Guru Tegh Bahadur also stayed here during his visit to Patna.

If one traces the beginning of 'Sikh Religion', which also known as a 'Gurmat Tradition', 'Sehaj Marag' and 'Khalsa Panth', in the context of Islam and Muslims without any bias. One thing is very much clear that neither the torch bearers of this new faith nor the followers of the faith put forth any kind of antidote to Islam and any kind of challenge to the contemporary Muslims in particular and Muslim society in general. However, it somehow had developed severe differences with the contemporary Government of Mogul dynasty after the rule of Emperor Akbar. Of course, they were also Muslims but the ruler's primary purpose was ruling as per their own designs. There is also a misconception among the people that the contemporary Muslims, being Muslims, were in tune with the contemporary government and were supportive to every policy of the government. Moreover, to consider the government as a Muslim Government which was guided by Islam is also erroneous. It was purely a feudal and dynastic government established by their own mighty military power. The history shows that Islam was disassociated from the governing place after the death of fourth Caliph H. Ali(R) in 660 AD.

However, it was known as caliphate but it is doomed to be dynastic and lost Islamic spirit of governance. Moreover, the change of governance set the process of feudalization of Islam itself. From that point of time Muslim Society in general was ruled by autocratic rulers of various dynasties in various geographical areas of the world. First it was known as caliphate of various dynasties. Later on it divided in different sultanates and kingdoms. The history also witnessed that there were various movements which emerges among Muslims against these autocratic rules to revive the lost spirit of Islamic governance of equality and liberty. In the context of governance and Islamic spirit the same thing had happened time and again on the Indian soil also. The movement or religious faith which was initiated by Baba Nanak might be correlated with them in Muslim context. Therefore, when Guru Gobind Singh announced as mentioned in his writings known as 'Bachitar Natak' 'hum eh kaaj jagat mo aye...'¹ that means I have a mission to bring back the justice in society. In the same anthology he mentions that he is the inspired by the divine force being the foremost disciple of the almighty when he states 'Mein hon param purakh ko dasa'. The Muslim Society, particularly of Punjab expresses to it an accepting nod as they sense it as the answer of their inner voice to go back to the Islamic way of governance of equality and liberty. When the mission creates mass awareness in Punjab and the contemporary government get alerted considering it a challenge. The Muslim Society not looks towards the movement on communal and religious grounds. Rather they support Guru Gobind Singh wherever and whenever they find a chance. As a matter of fact, he was also representing Punjab and peasantry resentments against the rulers. Never the less, Guru Gobind Singh himself have a non-sectarian approach as he said ' Hindu Turak kou Rafzi Imam Saafi Manas ki jaat sabhe aike Pehchanbo'² which vividly states that mankind is a single family and we ought to take care of each other as the member of a family.

Moreover, the whole Sikh tradition and history as such from the very beginning had an amicable approach towards the Muslim Society and its heritage. In this context the few generally discussed examples of the tradition seems appropriate to be mentioned here. Right from the very beginning the tradition mentioned that Guru Nanak was first identified out of his family as a Godly person by the king Bular known as Raye Bular Bhatti. He was a Muslim ruler of the region presently known as Nankana Sahib in Pakistan.³ That is the region in which Baba Nanak born and brought up. In later period, Baba Nanak in his travels known as 'Udasis' took Mardana Rabbabi a Muslim musician as his companion who spends at least fifty four years of his life in the company of Baba Nanak. During his travels Baba Nanak meets Peer Buddan Shah in the Jungles of district

¹ Randhir Singh (ed.), Dasam Granth (Shabadarth), Pothi pehli, Bachitar Natak, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1995, P.71

² ibid, P.28

³ Gian Singh, Glani Twarikh Guru Khalsa, vol. 1, P.72 ; Jaggi Rattan Singh, Sikh Panth Vishavkosh, vol2, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2002, P.1495

Ropar in Punjab, now popular as Kiratpur Sahib, who preserve miraculously milk to him for long time up to his new incarnation known as 'Chhevan Jama' or 6th Patshahi means when his spiritual consciousness transformed into 6th Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib.⁴ It is also an accepted fact among Sikh Sangat or the followers that whenever Baba Nanak feels mystical intensity to express his spiritual and moral teachings in his own ways of expression known as 'Bani', he was used to say that Mardana play Rabab, Bani is about to flow.⁵ Besides his own Bani Baba Nanak collects and gives due respect to the similar kinds of expressions of other Saints and Sufis of India. Among these Baba Farid was a renowned Sufi who's 'Kalam'- expression of mystic experience become an integral part of the Sikh Scripture- Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Not only Baba Farid but the Kalam of Sant Kabir, Bhagat Sadhana, Bhagat Bhikhan, Satta and Balwand also belong to the Muslim lineage. Therefore, Sri Guru Granth Sahib is repository of Islamic ethos along with other mystic ideas. It is such a unique scripture which preserve various languages of India along with some other aspects of Muslim Heritage of language and culture. When the movement which begins with the hymens of Baba Nanak and his teachings reached on the point of its crystallization and institutionalization known as 'Panthic developments', its character still remains composite and Muslim heritage was incorporated so much so that even the foundation stone of the central temple known as Golden temple of the growing community was laid down by Sai Miyan Meer- the famous Qadri Sufi.⁶

As per Sikh tradition when Guru Gobind Singh born at Patna in Bihar, he was acknowledged as an auspicious child at his birth and declared as a great spiritual, temporal and none sectarian humanistic leader of future in the very cradle and infancy by Peer Bhikam Shah of Distt. Kurukshetra, Haryana through the sense of his mystical vision. It is said that he himself took trouble along with his disciples to visit the city Patna Sahib in Bihar just only to have a glimpse of the newly born future guide and spiritual leader.⁷ In later period Bhikam Shah was the instrumental to bring close Peer Buddhu Shah to Guru Gobind Singh. He was the renowned Sufi Peer of Sadhoura residing in Shivalik hills. Sadhoura was a Jagir of that time which belongs to the family of the Peer. Now it is a part of Ambala district in Haryana. The place is very close to Paonta Sahib in Himachal Pardesh. Paonta become a famous place and takes a historic importance because of Guru Gobind Singh who selects it as a centre of his activities. Peer Buddhu Shah develops affinity with Guru Gobind Singh apparently because of common spiritual and humanistic ideas of Sufism and Gurmat. He admired the young Guru to his humanistic values and becomes his ally in the war against the enemies of the Guru. To him the struggle of the

⁴ Nabha, Bhai Kahan Singh, Mahan Kosh, P. 881

⁵ Gurdas, Bhai, Vaar Pehli, Paodi 35,(Baghdad Gaman)

⁶ Gian Singh, Giani, Panth Parkash(edit.) Giani Kirpal Singh, P.641

⁷ Santokh Singh, Bhai, Sri Gur Partap Suraj Grantha(edit.) Bhai Veer Singh, Raas 12,Ansu 14, PP.4275-76; Nabha, Bhai Kahan Singh, Mahan Kosh, P.177

Guru was justified in the prevailing situations and circumstances. The moment, he comes to know that five hundred Pathan soldiers had betrayed the Guru. Those were the Pathans who were employed by the Guru to protect Paonta Sahib as per peer's recommendation; he immediately decided to fight with the side of the Guru along with his sons and disciples. Eventually Peer Buddhu Shah lost his sons and many disciples in the war but the support of the Peer ultimately resulted in the victory of the Guru. It was the first full fledged battle of Gurus' life which known as battle of Bhangani. The battle proved decisive to the Sikh Panth which changed the destiny of the Panth forever and cleared the future course of action to the Guru. Never the less, the Guru expressed his deepest gratitude to the Peer. When the Peer comes to meet the Guru after the battle he was preparing to receive Sangat- the followers. At that moment the Guru gifts him as a sign of Gratitude whatever was in his hand, which was a turban and a comb with hairs. Peer Bhudhu Shah regarded the gift as a most precious thing throughout his life; the gift was preserved in his lineage generation after generation.⁸

In the early periods of 18th century the Sikh movement or Khalsa Panth in the leadership of Guru Gobind Singh come into direct conflict with the Mogul ruling establishment. Therefore, after the war of Anandpur Sahib and Chamkor Sahib, Guru Gobind Singh takes refuge in Machiwara near Samrala in Ludhiana distt. of Punjab. The area was confined by the imperial forces in search of Guru Gobind Singh. At this critical movement the two Muslim brothers of Pathan clan known as Nabi Khan and Gani Khan come forward to rescue the Guru from the confinement in the disguise of 'Uch da Peer'. The Uch city of Bahawalpur province of Punjab now in Pakistan was famous at that time for Sufi Peers and holy men.⁹ The Guru in the disguise of a Peer was carried forward in a palanquin on the shoulders of Nabi Khan and Gani Khan with the help of two others. The palanquin was deducted and suspected by one of the army commanders. To make it sure, that the person in palanquin is really a Peer of Uch, one Qazi known as Peer Muhammad was called upon to do the witness of authenticity of the Peer. Though the concerning Qazi recognized the real identity of the Guru but knowingly to save the Guru and to give him the safe passage he said let him go, he is the real Peer who is devoted in Allah's praise.¹⁰ This was the sacrifice of Nabi Khan, Gani Khan and Qazi Peer Muhammad which proved a second breather to Guru Gobind Singh after the battle of Bhangani in which Peer Budhu Shah appears as a savior of the growing Panth. After the escape in disguise of Uch da Peer Guru Gobind Singh stay at Raikot in district Ludhiana of Punjab in the house of his another Muslim devotee, Rai Kalha or Kalha Rai- A wealthy landlord or Jagirdar. Here the Guru gathers together the information about his family through Noora Mahi who was deputed by Ray Kalha to do intelligent services to the persecuted Guru. The feedback of the intelligence services of Ray

⁸ Nabha, Bhai Kahan Singh, Mahan Kosh, P.882 ; Gian Singh, Giani, Tawarikh Guru Khalsa, vol1, P. 837

⁹ Nabha, Bhai Kahan Singh, Mahan Kosh, P. 03

¹⁰ ibid, P. 837

[Type here]

Kalsha makes the Guru able to plan judiciously his next course of action. Here the Guru also expresses his grief and complaint of the local establishment to the centre government by writing 'Zafarnama'. As per tradition Zafarnama was delivered to Aurangzeb at Ahmednagar in the South of India.¹¹ The Study of the events reflects that the supporter and devotees of the Guru were not only among Muslim masses but there were many among the elite and governing classes also. In this context the change of Muslim mind of Punjab towards Guru Gobind Singh is quite apparent in the incident of dissention of Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan of Malerkotla from the Subedar of Sirhind-the Spear head of the government action against the Guru. Though Sher Khan was a bitter enemy of the Guru in earlier battles and wants to take revenge on the Guru for the killing of his brother by him in a battle. Nevertheless, when the Subedar of Sirhind announced the capital punishment to the very young age children of Guru Gobind Singh known as 'Sahibzadas' of the Guru, he openly denounced the order of the Subedar as an unlawful and irreligious act which is popular as '*Ha da Nahra*' in Sikh tradition and Punjabi folk. Moreover, the Nawab goes to such extent that he write letters of complaint of this incident to the emperor, Aurangzeb.¹²

The tradition of the Sikh Panth is full of such kinds of examples which show the harmonious relations of Gurus and the Panth with the contemporary Muslim Society of Punjab. The *Janam Sakhis* of Baba Nanak are also the best example of these kinds of close relations of Sikh tradition with indo Islamic tradition from the very beginning, which resulted in social intermixing, composite culture and mutual cooperation. Beside the above examples there were many other Muslims also who made their remarkable contribution in the development of Sikh tradition. Among them the Name of Malu Shekh, Ubare Khan, Wazir Khan, Bhai Abdullah, Sunder Shah, Babak Rababi, Khwaja Abdullah, Memoon Khan, Saida Beg, Said Khan, Nihang Khan, Bibi Mumtaz, Alam Khan and Mian Jamal are become the unforgettable part of the Sikh memory.¹³

Despite losing his children, Guru Gobind Singh remains surrendered to the will of the Almighty. He said that his children had come to him from the Creator. And that he understood that it was the time to sacrifice them for cause of Almighty. When a few of his Sikhs attempted to gather the bodies of his two eldest sons on the battlefield, Guru Gobind Singh asked them what they were doing. They replied that they wanted to give his sons a proper funeral. Guru Gobind Singh told them that they should then stop and pick up all of the bodies – for all of the boys and men lying dead on the battlefield were equally his sons.

¹¹ Nabha, Bhai Kahan Singh, Mahan Kosh, P. 1037

¹² Ganda Singh, Patiala and East Panjab States union-Historical Background, P. 79

¹³ Mohd. Habib (Dr.), Sikh Dharam naal sambhandit satkarit Muslim Shakshiatan, SLM Publishers, Patiala, 2016, PP. 162-174
[Type here]

Guru Gobind Singh's life was full of struggle, he sacrificed everything for the cause of almighty, and even the Adi Granth which was compiled by his great-grandfather Guru Arjan was lost in crisis period when struggling for life in bloody wars with royal armies. It is said that to retrace the Granth, Guru Gobind Singh set up his camp and dictated the entire Adi Granth from his memory to compile it again. In this form of the Granth he also included the hymns of his father, Guru Teg Bahadur.

One of Guru Gobind Singh's contributions to the world was the message of unity and equality among all sections of society. The Guru strongly feels his responsibility to create the unity among the people of Punjab in particular. Therefore, he stresses on the message of the universal brotherhood to the whole mankind. The Hindus, Muslim, Sikhs and others felt that they were treated fairly and equally within the domain of the Guru. In early period of the struggle the Guru's activities were centered in the area of Anandpur Sahib, which became an example of development and social change in his period. The process of reformation was spearheaded in this region by Guru Tegh Bahadur which was part of the kingdom of various Hindu kings and chiefs, where the Brahmanic brand of caste distinction was rigidly observed. Fellow human beings were confined in various casts and suffering of untouchablity. Hindu kingdoms were often at war with one another and were subjugated by the Mogul rulers. To get freedom from cast rigidity people were accepting Islam, particularly from the lower castes who were not even allowed to enter the temples of the religion that they were a part of. By joining Islam they could rapidly rise to the class of rulers and able to rule those who had called them untouchable only days before. Wars and skirmishes were a common occurrence in those days. However, by the efforts of the Guru's slowly and steadily this mood of agitation changed with the introduction of principals of self respect, equality and the unity of man. Thus, they provide discipline similar to Islam with in the tradition.

To conclude the above discussion it seems quite appropriate to say that the Gurmat Movement, Sikh faith and tradition which was initiated from the teachings of Baba Nanak was always considered by the Muslim Society as their own but with its distinct features. Later on the movement comes in conflicts with the Mogul establishment due to some administrative reasons but instead of its distinctive features it remains in emotional and ideological association with Islam and the contemporary Muslim Society. To the contemporary Muslim folk of Punjab Guru Gobind Singh was understood as a liberator of the people and of the oppressed.

References:

1. Nabha, Bhai Kahan Singh, Mahan Kosh, Basha Vibhag, Punjab, 1960
2. Mohd. Habib (Dr.), Sikh Dharam naal Sambhandit Satkarit Muslim Shakshiatan, SIM Publishers, Patiala, 2016
3. Randhir Singh (ed.), Dasam Granth (Shabadarth), Pothi pehli, Bachitar Natak, Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1995,
4. Gian Singh, Giani, Twarikh Guru Khalsa, Vol 1, Bhasha Vibhag, 1999
5. Gian Singh, Giani, Panth Parkash(edit.) Giani Kirpal Singh, Ad.- 2, Sri Amritsar, 1999
6. Santokh Singh, Bhai, Sri Gur Partap Suraj Granth-Vol.10, Bhasa Vibhag Punjab,2011
7. Jaggi Rattan Singh, Sikh Panth Vishavkosh, vol 2, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2002,
8. Ganda Singh, Patiala and East Panjab States union-Historical Background, Archives Department, Government of the Patiala and E. P. S. Union, Patiala, 1951
9. Jaggi, Gursharan Kaur(ed.), Vaaran Bhai Gurdas(Sampadan ate Path Nirdharan),Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1999