

FOREWORD

In the pursuit of its objectives, the Institute Of Sikh Studies (IOSS) organises seminars, group discussions, and represents its views on the burning topics concerning the Sikhs, and also publishes a quarterly journal, the *Abstracts Of Sikh Studies* (AOSS).

The Institute has been regularly holding its annual seminar for a number of years. The topics for discussion in these seminars are determined after thoughtful deliberations. At the annual seminar of the year 2004 held on November 13 and 14 (*Katak 30 & Maghar 01*, 536 Nanakshahi), in the lawns of Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara, Kanthala, Chandigarh — which houses the IOSS office — the topic for discussion was : *Martyrdom In Sikhism with Particular Reference to Sahibzadas*.

A galaxy of scholars and thinkers presented papers/made speeches at the seminar which was graced by very attentive and responsive audience of distinguished participants. Singh Sahib Jathedar Tarlochan Singh, presided over the opening session on November 13 and Dr Man Singh Nirankari on the afternoon session that day. Dr Jodh Singh presided over the morning session as also which was extended without lunch break to include the afternoon session of November 14.

Maj Gen Jaswant Singh (retd) and Sardar Gurpreet Singh ably compered the first and second session, respectively, on November 13 as Stage Secretary. Prof Prabhjot Kaur deftly conducted the proceedings on November 14 as Stage Secretary. The audience/speakers had come from all over Punjab as well as from other parts of India and abroad.

I had the pleasure of extending heartiest welcome to the participants at the start of sessions on November 13 and 14 and hoped

that the deliberations of this seminar would help in providing some solution to the problems faced by the Sikhs and other people. Before the proceedings of the seminar came to close on November 14, 2004, Bhai Ashok Singh thanked the participants for their kind patronage and co-operation to make the seminar a success.

Dr Kirpal Singh who had put scholarly labours in preparing his *Keynote Address* presented it in an eloquent mode, which stirred the audience to serious cogitation and set the tone and high level of speeches. The subsequent speakers further enhanced the standard of deliberations. Before the close of sessions each day, a good number of ladies/gentlemen from the audience too made their observations on the seminar subject. There were lively question-answer discussions. At the close of each session, the respective Presidents made erudite observations which were pithy critique of each session.

Very informative, elucidating, thought-provoking and learned representations were made by eminent speakers and some of the ladies/gentlemen from the audience. It was a very well organised and well-attended seminar which provided good opportunity to the scholars/thinkers concerned with the welfare of the Sikh people to get together and cogitate upon the daunting issues confronting them. After extensive discussions, the seminar came to a very successful and smooth end.

I am thankful to the members of the IOSS who extended their help and guidance in the smooth conduct of the seminar. Dr Kharak Singh, Dr Gurbakhsh Singh, Dr Kirpal Singh and Maj Gen Jaswant Singh spared no pains to ensure top-level participation, learned papers and fruitful deliberations. Bibi Baljit Kaur, Sardar Gurpreet Singh and Bhai Ashok Singh carried out the onerous work of public relations and media interaction. Maj Gen Jaswant Singh raised handsome amount of funds and ensured flawless stage/*pandal* arrangements.

Various organisations and individuals extended us generous assistance for organising the seminar. I would like to make a special mention of the kind patronage and liberal help extended to us by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Gurdwara Nadha Sahib, management of Gurdwara Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur, Sector 34, and Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Kanthala, Chandigarh. But for their help, smooth conduct of the seminar would not have been easy. I am

sincerely beholden to all of them for their gracious co-operation and generous help. I am sure their patronage will always be forthcoming in future too.

The IOSS has published the prominent papers presented at the seminar in this book. Views expressed in these papers are not necessarily opinion of the IOSS; these are of the paper presenters, to whom I am grateful for their hardwork in writing their learned papers.

Dr Kharak Singh and Dr Gurbakhsh Singh laboured hard not only in the organisation of the seminar, but they continued working with unremitting efforts, missionary zeal and scholarly diligence to compile the papers presented at the seminar.

The IOSS staff — Sardar Kartar Singh, Jaswant and Bibi Jaswinder Kaur carried out their duties in the organisation of the seminar cheerfully and with zeal. They worked hard in the preparation of this book. I appreciate their diligent input and am grateful to them.

Dr Kharak Singh has made another noteworthy contribution while preparing this compilation. He has written a compact note as *Introduction* to the contents, which offers a glimpse of the papers in the anthology. I am grateful to him for this and to the learned paper presenters and speakers at the seminar whose efforts might lead to refreshing solutions to the burning issues concerning the Sikhs.

I must express my sincere gratitude to my colleagues/members of the IOSS and its staff for the publication of this anthology. It is a team effort and all of us at the Institute always endeavour to assist readers in framing informed opinion on matters vital to their very existence.

Chandigarh
Pob 4, 536 NS (December 17, 2004)

Gurdev Singh
President
Institute of Sikh Studies

INTRODUCTION

The Institute Of Sikh Studies (IOSS) organized a Seminar on the 13th-14th November, 2004 (30th *Katak* -1st *Maghar*, 536 NS) on the theme *Martyrdom in Sikhism with Particular Reference to the Sabibzadas*, at Chandigarh in which a large galaxy of top scholars of Sikhism participated. The timing of the seminar as well as the selection of the theme could not be more appropriate. For, we are in the midst of the year which is being observed as the tercentenary of the martyrdom of the four *Sabibzadas* of Guru Gobind Singh, and the Panth, the world over, is paying homage to the matchless sacrifices of the Guru and his four sons and their martyrdom in the cause of righteousness. The theme is important not only because martyrdom is an integral part of the body of Sikh doctrines and because accounts of martyrs dominate the Sikh history, but also because some known adversaries of Sikh religion have raised some motivated questions on the status of Sikh martyrs, which demand a studied response. Moreover, just as Sikhs have been making history, but have seldom paused to record it, same holds true of the doctrine of martyrdom. While we are proud of the endless series of Sikh martyrs, we have failed to record details of their brave deeds and to study the lofty principles that inspired them to make the supreme sacrifices. The present seminar should, therefore, be considered a welcome step in the direction of making up this deficiency. The present volume is a compilation of the papers presented by the Scholars or a record of their deliberations.

The Seminar was inaugurated by Singh Sahib Giani Trilochan Singh, Jathedar, Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib, Anandpur Sahib. In his inspiring address delivered in chaste and flawless Punjabi, he said that Sikh martyrs were heroes, who, as defined by Kabir, are those who

fight for the cause of the weak or their faith, and suffer getting cut limb-by-limb, but never flee the battlefield¹. Quoting Bhai Gurdas², who said that among myriad other qualities, a martyr possess unlimited patience, complete faith in God and freedom from superstition and fear. A martyr is never afraid of death. Rather, he looks forward to it, considering it as his right in a noble cause.³ Referring to the high spiritual status of a martyr and obviously with Guru Arjun in his mind, Singh Sahib said that a martyr has no ill will even for his enemies, who inflict suffering and death on him. Even when seated on a hot plate, the martyr sung :

Put away from my mind is envy of others ...
None now is our foe nor a stranger
With all are we in accord.⁴

Dr Kirpal Singh who delivered the Keynote Address set the trend of discussion. Dealing with etymology of the word ‘martyr’, he explained :

“Martyr is a Greek word, which means witness. Its translation *shahid* is of Arabic and Persian origin which also, according to the Steinga’s Persian-English dictionary means witness or martyr. A martyr is considered to stand ‘witness’ to truth. The *shahid* is one who, by the supreme sacrifice for his faith, bears witness to its truth. A martyr is generally defined as one who chooses to suffer death rather than renounce his or her faith. The term ‘martyrdom’ is not identical with death. Persons die of various causes on which they have no control or from which they have no escape. Martyrdom, on the other hand, is offering one’s life for some noble principle knowingly and deliberately.”

He made a brief reference to the concept of martyrdom in Christianity and Islam :

“In Christianity, physical death is not essential to martyrdom. As Saint Jerome states, ‘It is not only the shedding of blood that is accounted as a confession. The spotless service of a devout mind is itself a daily martyrdom.’ Saint Thomas Aquinas (1274) a theologian, too, considers that on physical plane, ‘Martyrdom consists in the right endurance of suffering unjustly inflicted.’”

Recalling the Muslim tradition, he said :

“In the Muslim tradition there had been several celebrated martyrs

among the prophet's descendants and followers. The most important was Imam Hussain, son of Caliph Ali and grandson of Prophet Mohammad (son of his daughter, Zohra). He was killed in a battle and was buried at Karbla. The cause of conflict was that he refused to acknowledge Yazid as lawful Khalifa. Among the Sufi saints there had been a number of martyrs who were tortured to death because of their so-called unorthodox actions. Shams Tabriz was sentenced to be flayed alive in 1247 CE, because he raised a dead person to life, which was considered disobedience to God. Mansoor Hallaj (Shaikh Hussain Halley), was another celebrated martyr who was sentenced to death for proclaiming 'Anul Haq', viz., 'I am God' by the Khalifa of Baghdad in 919 AD.⁸ Like so many other terms, viz.,"

With this brief background, Dr Kirpal Singh dealt in detail with the concept of martyrdom in Sikhism. He said that like so many other words, the term *shahid* had come to India from Semitic culture.

In Sikhism, a *shahid* enjoys a unique status. The high value placed on martyrdom in the Sikh faith is evident from the fact that all Sikhs remember their innumerable martyr, in daily *ardas*.

Dr Kirpal Singh asserted that martyrdom was basic to the Sikh faith. Guru Nanak's call leaves no doubt about it :

Should thou seek to engage in the game of love,
step into my street with thy head on thy palm.
While on to this stepping
ungrudgingly sacrifice your head.⁵

He reproduced numerous other quotations in which Sikhs earnestly seek to sacrifice their lives in the noble cause expounded by their Gurus.

Dr Kirpal Singh also recalled the series of martyrdoms which started with the martyrdom of Guru Arjun. He pointed out :

"It is perhaps unique in the world history that one family should have given so many martyrs. The family of Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh Guru has provided a number of martyrs to guide and inspire the people. His son, Guru Arjun, was the first martyr among the Sikh Gurus. Guru Arjun's grandson, Guru Tegh Bahadur fell martyr to religious fanaticism of Aurangzeb. He laid down his life for the freedom of faith of the Hindus.

“Guru Tegh Bahadur’s grandsons, Sahibzadas Ajit Singh, Jujhar Singh, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, also become martyrs. The former two grandsons fell in the battle of Chamkaur, and the latter two were bricked alive in a wall at Sirhind and subsequently killed. Guru Gobind Singh attained martyrdom while in Nanded.”

Inspired by the examples of the Gurus, Sikhs shed the fear of death and never hesitated to sacrifice their lives in the defence of their faith and the defenceless. Examples recounted in the keynote address are Baba Banda Singh Bahadur and his 700 companions, Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Taru Singh, Baba Tara Singh Vani, martyrs of the two *Ghallugharas*, Baba Deep Singh and numerous other *shahids* who died defending the holy Harmandir Sahib in the 18th century. The ranks of Sikh martyrs continued to swell during the 19th and 20th century as well. Particular mention was made of Bhai Lachhman Singh and his *jatha* of 200 Sikhs to Sri Nankana Sahib, who courted martyrdom in the struggle to free the shrines of the Sikhs at Nankana Sahib in 1921.

Dr Dharam Singh agreed that the term *shahid* came to India with the advent of Islam. That does not, however, mean that there were no martyrs in India during the earlier period. He argues :

“When the Aryans invaded India, the Dravidians might have given them a good fight, and many on both sides might have fallen fighting. The Aryans who soon dominated the Indus Valley civilization and propagated the Vedas as the fountain of an emerging civilization, might have felt that their fight was for a cause, and the truth of that cause they were strongly committed to. The same would have been the case with the Dravidians. However, in ancient Indian tradition there was no particular or specific word to refer to one who fought and died for a cause, or for certain values. Even in the *Bhagavad Gita* such a death has been eulogized, but still there is no word to denote a *shahid*. Also, in the Indian religious tradition, we find a significant role for divine intervention in a fight between Good and Evil. In this fight, the evil and the evildoer meet their end, but in place of the person who fought and died for the sake of Good the credit invariably goes to divine power.

“During this while, the followers of non-Vedic indigenous faiths,

the Jains and the Buddhists, were persecuted at places. No doubt, these different traditions soon forged unifying ties by connecting their respective deities into relationships. This created amongst them a spirit of accommodation and tolerance. Still many might have suffered privation, and even death, for their commitment to a righteous cause during the Aryan struggle for supremacy. But in all such struggles, there was always supposed divine intervention on behalf of the Good, thus minimizing the significance of human suffering and sacrifice, and giving credit for everything to the divine. That is perhaps why there has been no Indian equivalent word for *shahid* or *shahadat*.”

Referring to the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, he says he made the supreme sacrifice for the sake of another faith he himself did not share, and thus raised the concept to new heights setting a unique example in history. He says :

“Thus, Guru Tegh Bahadur took up cudgels on behalf of the hapless Hindus on his own; it was more for redeeming freedom of faith for people irrespective of the religious tradition they belonged to. In the Indian history and folklore, he has always been remembered as the protector of the Hindu faith – a unique example of its kind in the history of mankind. Interestingly, there are several Sikh scriptural hymns criticizing *janeu* and *tilak* which the Brahminical class had begun to consider an end in themselves, thus giving precedence to form over the spirit of religion, but the Guru stood for freedom of belief and practice for everyone. The religious history of mankind provides no second example of a spiritual leader laying down his life for the people belonging to a religious tradition other than his own. Second, the Sikh Gurus had nothing against Islam as such, and the Sikh scripture unequivocally states that the scriptures of neither the Indian nor Semitic religions can be called false, rather false are those who do not reflect on them. Had the contemporary political situation in India been the other way round, Guru Tegh Bahadur would surely have made the same sacrifice for the sake of Muslims.”

Dr Hakam Singh compares the concept of martyrdom in different religions. “Buddhism neither believes in heaven and hell, nor does it profess violence (it believes in *ahimsa*), therefore, the idea of martyrdom in any form is completely absent in this faith. In Hinduism also the

concept of martyrdom seems to be absent. Sanskrits, the language of the ancient Vedic (Hindu) religion does not even have a word equivalent or close (in meaning) to martyrdom. Swami Ram Tirath thinks that in Hinduism human life was considered as a gift from God, and, therefore, too sacred to be glorified when sacrificed for any human endeavour.

“In Judaism the interpretation of the concept of martyrdom seems to be somewhat different from other Semitic faiths. It simply means ‘standing up to the principles of faith, even when one has to face hardships and oppression. The famous episode of ‘Masada’ where all Jews preferred to commit suicide rather than boldly fight the enemy in the battlefield, amply illustrates this point.

“The inception of Christianity came as a result of death, by torture of Jesus Christ. This event is considered by the followers of this faith as the highest act of martyrdom. Christianity is thus predicated around the concept of triumphing over death as Jesus did. Under such circumstances it stands to reason why the concept of dying for one’s religion would be given so much importance. Thus, by fourth century (CE) the idea of dying for Jesus Christ had morphed into the idea of martyrdom in which dying for one’s faith was considered not just a duty (because it was emulating Jesus) but an honor and a privilege.

“This simplistic explanation, however, ignores one important psychological reason for exaltation of such a death to such a high level. Among Christians it is a firm belief that Jesus sacrificed his life to wash off the sins committed by humanity through Adam. Thus he is responsible for interceding between God and the faithful (atonement). All a believer has to do is to confirm faith in Jesus, and he shall have a seat reserved for him in heaven. Psychologically, it introduces a guilt complex (all Christians are indebted to Jesus for what he did and what he will do for them in the hereafter) which is the driving force for Christians to emulate Jesus Christ and embrace martyrdom.

“With the beginning of Islam came the Arabic word *shabada* or *shahadat* which is conceptually similar to the word martyrdom, but has even broader meaning. It means to see, to witness, to testify or to become a role model. This word is inseparably associated with the Islamic concept of *jehad* or holy struggle. A *shahid* (*shahheed*) is, therefore,

a person who in struggle (*jehad*) witnesses the truth, and stands by it firmly to the extent that not only he testifies to it verbally, but is prepared to fight for the truth and, if necessary, give up his life and thus become a role model for others.”

In essence, according to Islam, martyrdom applies only when it is preceded by *jehad* which is an inclusive struggle for the truth (the way the truth is interpreted in this faith). A person involved in *jehad* (a *mujahid*) always dies the death of a martyr even if he does not fall on the battlefield, as long as he stays loyal to the truth and stays ready to fight for and defend the truth at all costs.

“Promise of reward for martyrdom in Islam is more specific, including, *inter alia*,

1. Forgiveness with the first drop of his spilt blood.
2. A guaranteed place in paradise with a celestial crown on his head.
3. Availability of seventy two virgins.
4. Authority to intercede for seventy two of his relatives.”

Dr Hakam Singh concludes :

“Sikhism: Sikhism elevated the concept of martyrdom to new heights when Guru Nanak, the first prophet said:

Should you have an urge to play the game of love,
step into my lane with your head placed on your palm.
Once embarked on this path,
Hesitate not to sacrifice your head.⁵

Guru Nanak did not offer any rewards or enticements for playing the game of love even at the cost of one’s life. Also, there is no guilt complex among Sikhs because none of the Sikh Gurus gave any promise of intercession for any one who expressed unconditional full faith in Sikhism. Whatever one sows, so does he reap.⁶

Also:

‘(in this age of Kali) One gets retribution for what one does.
No one gets caught in anyone else’s place’.⁷

“Furthermore, Sikhism does not believe in sinful birth of human beings. Love for God and Guru, or staying steadfastly on the path that leads to the Supreme Reality, is something that is beyond the idea of any rewards corresponding to attainment of paradise full of virgins.

“Sikh history is full of examples where all kinds of worldly rewards and even promises of paradise (after death) were offered but the Sikh martyrs summarily rejected them for the sake of love for their Guru and God.”

Sardar Bhagwant Singh Dalawari explained the philosophic basis martyrdom in *gurbani* and referred to the glorious heritage in contrast to the present degeneration. He laments :

“The shenanigans of our so-called political leaders, *jathedars*, and even intellectuals, have now proved to be our undoing. Not only have we become victims of material degeneration and personal pelf and illegal and immoral pursuits, but we have also thrown up leaders who are willing to sell themselves, sell the *panth*, for the sake of ministerships, illegal gratifications and other temptations. So, the concept of martyrdom or even righteousness has been forgotten. Ordinary Sikhs, too, have become paraders of ostentatious living, black money, 5-star culture with total alienation from the Guru’s word and Guru’s way of life, and our *Sikhi* is now only the external display of ill-gotten wealth, dubious grandeur and dishonest practices. The rot has been strengthened by Babas of *deras*, whom even our political leaders pay obeisance, and who benefit from their nefarious activities. *Jathedars* have become political tools of their political masters in the SGPC or DSGMC, members of whom have come to occupy seats of power by bribery, corruption and winning the voters. Where is then the question of martyrdom and selfless sacrifice?”

He concluded his paper with the following observations :

“Firstly, the concept of Martyrdom is to be analysed with righteousness as the base for living. And the strength is to come from commitment to honesty, truth and faith in God.

Secondly, the selflessness has to be the hallmark, in all circumstances, when a Sikh lays down his life for a cause.

Thirdly, no circulation or a hankering for recognition is taken into consideration.

Fourthly, the credit for all kinds of sacrifice and the ultimate willingness to die, has to be part of a training to be uncompromising in defiance of tyranny, and

Fifthly, no temptation, no one-upmanship, no chicanery and

no hoodwinking should deflect a Sikh whose commitment to righteousness is total and irrevocable.”

Sardar Gajinder Singh explained that the idea of sacrifices is distinct from the principle of martyrdom, *shabadat*. He says :

“The idea of sacrifice is distinct from the principle of martyrdom, *shabadat*. The ritual of sacrifice is an ancient act of religiosity, which has been present in a different context in the Indian thought, but in its present form, it was mooted by Guru Nanak. Till then, the Indian thrust was on sacrifice as an invocation. The rationale of sacrifice was personal. The brave man dashed out to fight and die to become *amar* (immortal). The woman committed *satti* as a sacred duty of her widowed state to gain benefits in her next incarnation. One sacrificed his body in a religious frenzy, because he expected thereby to gain spiritually. The *satta* and the *tantric* invoking the black powers of *Sakti* offered, as a sacrifice, the innocent child or adult, luring him to the venue of sacrifice for attaining personal gains in the present life as well as in future. These practices which are still part of the curriculum of many sects, were rejected outright by the Guru as of no avail in gaining spiritual or physical strength or mundane benefits.”

He also pointed out that in Sikh history martyrs were not confined to martial classes. In fact, response came equally from backward classes. Guru Gobind Singh also did not make any distinction between his sons and other Sikhs in this respect.

Dr Gurnam Kaur says that concept of martyrdom is present in the *bani* revealed through our Gurus, and that love is its source. She makes the following points :

- a) Love of God leads to love of His creation.
- b) Total submission to His Will is the way of love.
- c) A person is free to choose this faith of love. There is no compulsion.
- d) The choice is based on reasoning and contemplation.

She holds the view that all sacrifices made by Sikh martyrs were inspired by Love.

Dr Birendra Kaur brought out that whereas martyrs of other faiths offered/laid down their lives in defence of truths/gods of their respective faiths only, the Guru’s followers died fighting valiantly,

defending universal values and concerns, irrespective of faith – their own or any other's. They believed in only One God of all humanity and, therefore, their aim was to achieve equality and justice for everyone.

She feels, however, that unity is basic and imperative before the present-day Panth can achieve anything near what our martyrs of yore did during the past few centuries.

The articles by Maj Gen Jaswant Singh, Brig Hardit Singh, Dr Rupinderjit Kaur, Prof Prithipal Singh Kapur, Principal Surjit Singh Gandhi, Dr G S Nayyar, Sardar Nanak Singh Nishtar are indeed very thought-provoking. With extensive quotations from *Gurbani*, it is shown that the concept of martyrdom is deeply rooted in the basic philosophy of Sikhism. They also refer to prominent Sikh martyrs in Sikh History. Nishtar says that motivation for martyrdom was provided by Guru Nanak, but it took 239 years for him and his successors to prepare the society for living with dignity through a whole-life philosophy. Rupinderjit Kaur pleads that those who died in the Blue-star attack and the Delhi massacre in 1984 should be considered martyrs.

Sardar Harbans Singh Noor's article is devoted to Baba Deep Singh. As a background, he narrates the unsettled conditions in Punjab during that period, and the circumstances in which Baba Deep Singh courted martyrdom in the struggle for liberation of Sri Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar.

Besides the inaugural address by Singh Sahib Trilochan Singh, articles by Dr Sukhdial Singh, Dr Harchand Singh Sirhindi, Dr Dharam Singh, Prof Hardev Singh Virk, Dr Harnam Singh Shan, Brig Hardit Singh and Dr Darshan Singh adorn the Punjabi Section. Dr Sukhdial Singh argued that emphasis on the need for documentary evidence in the history of revolutionary movements, was clearly misplaced, since then in authority were never let the truth come out, unless it is in their favour. In the circumstances, tradition is the only reliable source, so that brief hold by people cannot be wrong.

Dr Harchand Singh Sirhindi shows that it was the martyrdom of the Sahibzadas that laid the foundation of the Sikh rule in Punjab.

Dr Dharam Singh stresses the importance of *Vars* in Sikh history, and deals critically with the *var*, *Char Sahibzadé* by Sohan Singh Ghukewalia, a popular *dhadi* of the early twentieth century. He

composed his own *vars*, in which he lists the established facts about Sikh martyrs or those who participated in the Sikh struggle during the 18th century. Dr Dharam Singh pleads that all such literature should be compiled and preserved.

Prof Hardev Singh Virk distinguishes sacrifice from martyrdom. The former was prevalent in tribal cultures as well as in followers of higher religions like Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Sacrifice of animals to please a deity or for particular personal boons, is still common. Sacrifice of human beings was also practised, and is still not uncommon among *satta*, *tantrics* and certain other cults. As against this, martyrdom is inspired by a desire to uphold a principle and for common good of humanity. The Gurus provided this model through personal example.

Sikhs hold martyrs in highest esteem. They are in fact believed to have conquered death and attained eternal life. It is perhaps the first time when a seminar has been held on the vital theme of martyrdom. It is gratifying that so many top scholars committed to Sikh studies responded to the call of the IOSS and contributed the papers published in this volume, which throw a flood of light on the subject. It is hoped that readers will greatly benefit from the views expressed by the learned scholars. We are also hoping that these articles will lead to further discussion with focus on the special features that mark the concept of martyrdom in Sikhism and distinguish it from earlier faiths.

In the end, I wish to record my gratitude for generous help rendered by Dr Birendra Kaur and Sardar Inderjeet Singh, in the compilation of this report including valuable advice on its format and content, besides proofreading. Mr Ramesh who typed the manuscript also deserves sincere thanks.

Kharak Singh
Editor

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS**CONCEPT OF MARTYRDOM IN SIKHISM****and****MARTYRDOM OF SAHIBAZADAS***Kirpal Singh**

Etymologically ‘martyr’ is a Greek word, which means ‘witness’. It implies a person tortured or killed because of his faith or belief. Its translation *shahid* is of Arabic and Persian origin which also, according to the Steinga’s Persian-English dictionary means ‘witness’ or ‘martyr’. A martyr is considered to stand ‘witness’ to truth. The *shahid* is one who, by the supreme sacrifice for his faith, bears witness to its truth. A martyr is generally defined as one who chooses to suffer death rather than renounce his or her faith. The term ‘martyrdom’ is not identical with death. Persons die of various causes on which they have no control or have no escape; martyrdom, on the other hand, is offering one’s life for some noble principle knowingly and deliberately.

In Christianity, physical death is not essential to martyrdom as Saint Jerome states, “It is not only the shedding of blood that is accounted as a confession. The spotless service of a devout mind is itself a daily martyrdom.”¹ Saint Thomas Aquinas (1274 CE) a theologian too, considers that on physical plane, “Martyrdom consists in the right endurance of suffering unjustly inflicted.”²

In Sikhism too, a devotee is required to lead a spotless life wholly devoted to the Guru and God, but also he should be prepared to make maximum sacrifice to the extent of shedding his blood. Even Guru Nanak (1469-1539 CE), founder of Sikhism, writes :

Should thou seek to engage in the game of love,
Step into my street with thy head on thy palm.
While on to this stepping
Ungrudgingly sacrifice your head.³

Guru Arjun, the fifth Sikh Guru, emphasized this point when he wrote :

First accept death as inevitable,
And attachment to life discard;
Turn dust of the feet of all,
Thereafter come to us.⁴

Among the Christians, sacrifice of Jesus is considered supreme. His contemporaries John Baptist (15BC-28AD) and after Christ, John Huss (1369-1415) are also considered great martyrs. The former was beheaded at the instigation of Salome, the daughter of Herodia, the ruler of the place, and the latter was burnt at stake for his unorthodox doctrine.⁵

In the Muslim tradition, there had been several celebrated martyrs among the prophet's descendants and followers. The most important was Imam Hussain, son of Caliph Ali and grandson of Prophet Mohammad (son of his daughter, Zohra). He was killed in a battle and was buried at Karbla. The cause of conflict was that he refused to acknowledge Yazid as lawful Khalifa.⁶ Among the Sufi saints, there had been a number of martyrs who were tortured to death because of their so-called unorthodox actions. Shams Tabriz was sentenced to be flayed alive in 1247 CE, because he raised a dead person to life, which was considered disobedience to God.⁷ Mansoor Hallaj (Shaikh Hussain Halley), was another celebrated martyr who was sentenced to death for proclaiming 'Anul Haq', viz., 'I am God' by the Khalifa of Baghdad in 919 AD.⁸ Like so many other terms, viz., *ardas*, *sahibzada*, the term *shahid* has come to India from Semitic culture. In India, only among the Sikhs it has become very popular. It is, therefore, very important to understand the connotation of the term *shahid* in Sikhism.

Conception of Martyrdom in Sikhism

The Sikhs remember their martyrs daily both the times – morning and evening, during their *Ardas* :

“The five beloved ones, four *Sahibzadas* (sons of Guru Gobind Singh), forty delivered ones, those who remained steadfast, those who meditated on the Name of God, shared their earnings with others, those who wielded their sword for the service of all, ran free kitchen, those who overlooked the shortcomings of others, hail the deeds of such pure and true devotees and utter ‘Waheguru’.

“Those men and women who sacrificed their heads for the sake of Dharma, had themselves cut into pieces from joint to joint, who got their scalps removed, who were cut into pieces on the moving wheels, got themselves sawn by saw, flayed alive and made sacrifices for the service of Gurdwaras, who did not surrender their faith and preserved the long hair (symbol of the Guru) till their last breath, hail their wonderful deeds and utter ‘Waheguru’.”

Sikh Gurus taught the Sikhs to live honorably and fight tyranny to the end. Guru Nanak has stated :

If one lives in ignominy all his gains are illegitimate.⁹

Guru Nanak exhorts in *rag wadhans* that one should not be afraid of death. Heroic death is holy :

Men revile not Death. Death is not an evil, should one know how truly to die. The death of heroic men is holy, should they lay down their lives for a righteous cause.¹⁰

A verse of Bhagat Kabir in the Holy Granth portrays the same spirit of heroism :

The sky resounding kettle-drum is sounded :

The Heart is pierced with the passion for righteousness.

The hero, entering the field, fights on without flinching.

Know that man to be a true hero who fights in defence of the defenceless ,

Hacked limb-by-limb, he still flees not the field.¹¹

In *Chandi di Var* in the *Dasam Granth*, a boon is sought from God to laying down one’s life in the field of battle, fighting to defend

righteousness :

Lord ! grant me this boon :
 May I never turn my back on the right path,
 May I never fear when face-to-face with the foe;
 May I ever direct my mind to chanting Thy praises;
 And when the end arrives, may I fall fighting squarely on the
 field of battle.¹²

Another text glorifying the spirit of martyrdom occurs at the close of the epic *Krishnavatar* in the *Dasam Granth* :

Blessed be he whose tongue lauds God,
 And who in his mind contemplates holy war.
 This perishable frame shall not last;
 Let man through sacrifice sail in the ship of glory.
 And thereby swim across the ocean of the world.
 His body the home of spiritual poise,
 His mind aglow like a lamp lit;
 With the broom of God-realisation should he sweep away the
 dust-heap of cowardice.¹³

Martyrdom in Sikh History

It is perhaps unique in the world history that one family should have given so many martyrs. The family of Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh Guru has provided a number of martyrs to guide and inspire the people. His son, Guru Arjun, was the first martyr among the Sikh Gurus. Jahangir (1605-1627 AD), a Mughal emperor wanted to convert him to Islam. As recorded in his memoirs, he wanted to 'close his shop of falsehood.'¹⁴ Guru Arjun's grandson, Guru Tegh Bahadur fell martyr to religious fanaticism of Aurangzeb. He laid down his life for the freedom of faith of the Hindus. It is recorded in the *Bachitar Natak* :

There did the Master protect the frontal mark and the sacred thread of the Hindus. Thus did he bring about a great event in the dark age. He did so much for God's people, giving up his life without grouse.¹⁵

Guru Tegh Bahadur's grandsons, Sahibzadas Ajit Singh, Jujhar Singh, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, also become martyrs. The former two grandsons fell in the battle of Chamkaur, and the latter

two were bricked alive in a wall at Sirhind and subsequently killed. Guru Gobind Singh attained martyrdom while in Nanded.¹⁶

Inspired by the Gurus' examples, numerous others gave their lives for the cause of Dharma. Sikhs during their short history of three to four hundred years have given a long line of martyrs. Banda Singh Bahadur in 1716 was martyred in Delhi with 700 soldiers. Khafi Khan the contemporary historian, who often called abusive names to Sikhs, has great admiration for Banda Singh Bahadur and his soldiers. He has recorded in the endnote the story of a youth who had been arrested along with the soldiers of Banda Singh Bahadur. His mother approached the Mughal Emperor to free her son, on the plea that he was not a Sikh and had been arrested by mistake. Emperor took pity on her and gave orders to release her son. She happily brought this order to the executioner. Khafi Khan writes that the young man was brought before his mother who intimated him about the orders of the Emperor. But this young man said, "My mother is telling a lie, I am a devoted Sikh and I will die with my companions." Saying this he left his mother to join his companions, who were waiting for their execution.¹⁷

During the eighteenth century, there have been countless Sikhs who died for the Sikh Dharma. Prominent among them were Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Taru Singh, Bhai Tara Singh Vaan, etc., etc. In the *Wadda Ghallughara* of 1762, it is estimated that twenty thousand Sikhs were killed. But this could not crush the spirit of Khalsa. Rattan Singh Bhangoo, author of *Panth Parkash* writes, "Sikhs had a fondness for death. To court death they had now found the opportunity. Their lives they held not dear. They did not feel pain if their bodies were slashed. To martyrdom are we wedded? We turn not our backs upon it – sang the Sikhs."¹⁸

In 1757, Baba Deep Singh, a great martyr heard that Darbar Sahib had been destroyed by the forces of Jahan Khan, the Afghan commander. He organised a band of warriors who were prepared to die for the sake of Dharma. Baba Deep Singh valiantly fought against the Afghans on the road leading to Amritsar from Tarn Taran. It is said that he continued fighting even after his head was cut off by the enemy.¹⁹ After his martyrdom, when the Sikhs came to power, *Misal Shabeedan* was named after him.

How valiantly and fearlessly Sikhs defended Akal Takht when Ahmad Shah Abdali attacked the holy building, had been recorded by Qazi Nur Mohammad. He was an eyewitness. He states :

“From Lahore, he spent three nights on the way and on the fourth night arrived at the Chak. The dogs had already received the information of the lions coming upon them and they had, therefore, disappeared from there also.

“When the Shah arrived at the Chak there was not a single *kafir* to be seen there. But a few of them had remained in an enclosure – Akal Bunga – so that they might spill their own blood. And they sacrificed their lives for the Guru. When they saw the renowned king and the army of Islam, they came out of the enclosure. They were only thirty in number. But they had not a grain of fear about them. They had neither the fear of slaughter nor the dread of death. Thus they grappled with the Ghazis, and in this grappling they spilt their own blood. All the accursed Sikhs were killed and went to hell. The Islamic ran to the right and the left in search of them, but they did not find even one of the impertinent dogs. The Shah had, therefore, to return (to Lahore) helplessly.”²⁰

There were a number of *shahids* during the 20th century. *Jatha* of Bhai Lachhman Singh along with about 200 followers went to Gurdwara Nanakana Sahib and were killed by the *mahant* of the Gurdwara. They are known as *shahids* of Nankana Sahib. In their memory, Nankana Sahib Saheed Sikh Missionary College, Amritsar was named by the SGPC, Amritsar.

A large number of Sikhs laid down their lives during the partition of Punjab. They were given the choice to embrace Islam and save their lives. But they declined the offer. The anecdotes of martyrs of 1947 were compiled by this writer under the title *Shahidian* and published by the Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1964. This book is available with the publishers.

Since we are celebrating the Tercentenary of martyrdom of *Sahibzadas* of Guru Gobind Singh, it is, therefore, very important to give some brief account of their martyrdom also.

Martyrdom of Princes Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh

When the Mughal army reinforced by the hill rajas attacked Anandpur in 1703, the brave Khalsa garrison withstood the furies for months. In an unfortunate moment, the garrison vacated the fortress on the express promise confirmed by oaths on the *Koran* and the holy cow, that they would not in any way be molested. However, no sooner did the Khalsa contingent leave the precincts of Anandpur, that the whole host of treacherous enemy fell upon them. The contest was unequal, and it was not long before the Khalsa gave way and dispersed in all directions. Some men remained with the Guru, who, aided by Prince Ajit Singh, turned back to parry the blows of the enemy until they reached the banks of the Hill torrent, Sirsa. Here the party plunged their horses into the surging flood, and escaped to the other bank, whence they proceeded in the direction of Chamkaur, where they halted. Night was advancing and the enemy was on the track. In the village, there was a fairly big barn. It was forthwith appropriated and hastily repaired. Meantime, the enemy reached the spot in thousands and encamped on the village common land, facing the barn. The Guru's followers consisted of only a few dozen intrepid disciples whose sorties under the cover of darkness wrought havoc in the ranks of the foe.

In the morning it was decided that there was no use fighting from within the enclosure, and that each and every member of the party should issue forth, engage in hand-to-hand combat and sell his life as dearly as possible. The lead was taken by Prince Ajit Singh, then only seventeen. He boldly fell upon the thickened ranks of the heavily clad enemy host and hewed down a large number of them, till he was himself overpowered, and thus received martyrdom. Brave Prince Jujhar Singh, only fourteen years old, was standing on the barn wall along with the Guru, and was witnessing the glorious feats of his valliant brother. The sight of those deeds of heroism inspired his young heart, and he craved permission to take the next place in the ranks of the next day's martyrs. The permission did not take long to come. The Guru helped his darling in putting on his armour and mounting his favourite steed. The brave son of the ever great Guru Gobind Singh sailed forth, with the dash and daring of an experienced four score old commander. The enemy horde was wonder-struck at

the sight and gave way before the boy warrior's onslaught, and the heads of not a few of them were chopped off as they were receding. Thither the cherub-like Jujhar flew and was received in the lap of the Lord of Hosts.

Battle of Chamkaur is the only battle which has been mentioned in the official records of Aurangzeb. Though unequal, it was well contested. Aurangzeb specially intended his generals to send reinforcement and an arsenal to Chamkaur as recorded in *Abkam-i-Alamgiri* vide *Tarikh-i-Makbaz-i-Sikhan* (Ganda Singh).

Martyrdom of Princes Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh

These two princes were the youngest sons of Guru Gobind Singh. They were nearly eight and six years old, respectively, when they received martyrdom. While, after evacuation, the Guru himself, with his two eldest sons, Prince Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh and a handful of followers, reached Chamkaur, his wife, Sunder Devi, was safely escorted to Delhi by Bhai Daya Singh. The Guru's venerable mother, Mata Gujri, with the two youngest sons of the Guru, Princes Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, yielded to the persuasions of their old family servant, Gangu, a low Brahmin, to take shelter in his village, not far off. Arriving there, he lost no time in betraying them. This act of treachery brought him some reward from the Mussalman ruler of the place. The old lady and her wards were taken to Sirhind. Wazir Khan, the Governor, held a council of his *ulemas* and *qazis*, all of whom urged that the boys be either converted to Islam or put to death. The brave sons of the brave father elected the latter alternative. The *nawab* of Malerkotla, who was at that time sitting with Wazir Khan, recommended that the lives of the children be spared, but the Hindu minister, Sucha Nand, to display his zeal for his Mussalman masters, was for the immediate assassination of the children. It was a serious mistake, observed this miscreant, to be infatuated with the young ones of a cobra, and nurse them with milk. Even the blood-thirsty Wazir Khan was struck with horror at the cold-bloodedness of this monster in human form, but the weight of the *ulema's* opinion was thrown in favour of Sucha Nand's suggestion. The princes were sentenced to be bricked alive in the walls of the Sirhind fortress. The boys heard

the sentence with calm. When they were bricked up to the waist, they were again called upon by Wazir Khan to abjure their faith and accept the *kalima* of the Prophet – “Be gone, miscreant”, replied they, “quench thy thirst for blood. We are sons of the great Guru Gobind Singh. Fear approacheth us not. We would rather lose our lives at the hands of the *malechhas* (the polluted).” This brave retort cost the princes their lives. Immediately then, their heads were cut off (1705 AD).

The martyrdom of *Sabibzadas* has got great importance in the history of Punjab. It is a turning point, hence a landmark and watershed. Since the two younger *Sabibzadas* were killed in Sirhind, all the Sikhs called it as *Guru Mari Sirhind*. It was a big city and capital of the region with a big fort and a huge army. People laughed at Sikhs, saying that they could not do any harm to Sirhind. But it is a historical fact that when the Sikhs gathered strength, their main target was Sirhind. It was first attacked in 1710 AD by Sikhs, under Banda Singh Bahadur. Later, when Budha Dal and Taruna Dal joined together, they led an attack on Sirhind in 1754 AD. They again attacked Sirhind along with Marathas in 1757 AD. Finally Sirhind was attacked in 1763 AD and the Afghan Governor Zain Khan was killed. The Sikhs divided the territory of Sirhind among themselves. Therefore, Lepel Griffin writes, “Sikhs got political power on account of their religious sentiments.”

It is also a miracle of history that the Sikhs whose head carried price, became rulers of the land within a few decades. This is due to the long line of martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the Sikh Dharma.

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MARTYRDOM IN SIKHISM

DHARAM SINGH*

Martyrdom or *shabadat* is the high tragedy of supreme sacrifice one makes for one's faith and thus bears witness to its truth and to one's own passionate adherence to it. Implicitly, a martyr or *shahid* is one who by courting martyrdom bears witness to the truth of his faith and to his own unswerving commitment and allegiance to it. Implicit in martyrdom is one's willingness to withstand aggression or persecution, and meet death or, short of that, suffer privation for upholding a righteous and noble cause.

The term 'martyrdom' has roots in the Greek word 'martyr' which stands for 'witness'. There was no synonym of martyr or martyrdom in any of the Indian languages until Sikh tradition adopted the word *shabadat*, borrowed from Arabic, which also means testimony or affirmation. In India there has been a tradition of self-inflicted suffering with a view to purifying one's own inner self or to awakening the conscience of the oppressor tyrant. There have been numerous instances of self-destruction by many holy men for the purpose of checking the tyrant from committing evil. In fact, the concept of *satyagrah* used as a political weapon by Mahatma Gandhi during the twentieth century has also its seeds in this background. However, this kind of sacrifice cannot be called martyrdom or *shabadat* despite the fact that it contains many elements of martyrdom: the major element of suffering persecution at the hands of the tyrant and getting killed at his hands has, however, been absent.

When the Aryans invaded India, the Dravidians might have given them a good fight, and many on both sides might have fallen fighting. The Aryans who soon dominated the Indus Valley civilization and propagated the Vedas as the fountain of an emerging civilization, might

have felt their fight was for a cause, and the truth of that cause they were strongly committed to. The same would have been the case with the Dravidians. However, in ancient Indian tradition there was not particular or specific word to refer to one who fought and died for a cause, for certain values. Even in the *Bhagavad Gita* such a death has been eulogized, but still there is no word to denote a *shahid*. Also, in the Indian religious tradition, we find a significant role for divine intervention in a fight between Good and Evil. In this fight, the evil and the evil-doer meet their end, but in place of the person who fought and died for the sake of Good, the credit invariably goes to divine power.

During this while, the followers of non-Vedic indigenous faiths, the Jains and the Buddhists, were persecuted at places. No doubt, these different traditions soon forged unifying ties by connecting their respective deities into relationships. This created amongst them a spirit of accommodation and tolerance. Still many might have suffered privation and even death for their commitment to a righteous cause during the Aryan struggle for supremacy. But in all such struggles, there was always supposed divine intervention on behalf of the Good, thus minimizing the significance of human suffering and sacrifice and giving credit for everything to the divine. That is perhaps why there has been no Indian equivalent word for *shahid* or *shahadat*.

At the time the Sikh religion originated, there were two prominent religions – Hinduism and Islam, prevalent in India. No doubt, in the pre-Aryan India existed an organized religious life based on its own philosophy of life as shows the Rig Vedic reference to the *sramanas*. The Aryans soon dominated the Indus Valley civilization, but the acculturation between the two ethnic groups gradually gave birth to a worldview dominated by the Vedic tradition. This worldview favoured life-negation and world-negation, and religion became devoid of any social context. The divorce from social reality reduced religion to a set of arid beliefs and lifeless rituals. The voice of truth got lost in the din of the clashes of the mutually contradictory philosophical doctrines expounded by the numerous sects and sub-sects that had emerged. The social structure was horizontally divided into four different caste groups. Sexism existed as a system of marginalization of woman. This sexist discrimination against her became all the worse when she happened to belong to the so-called lower class in society.

The doctrine of life-negation and world-negation brought in its wake moral and ethical bankruptcy in socio-religious and subjugation in political life. The Muslims who came to India as traders in the south soon turned invaders in the north-west and then conquerors and rulers of India. It was Babar who invaded India in 1526 and caused much death and destruction, unleashing inexpressible atrocities and oppression on the natives. During the Guru-period, Akbar was the sole exception of being a liberal king. The pendulum swung toward bigotry and intolerance, coercion and oppression during almost all other other regimes. There was as early as the Sultanate period “an attempt for the complete imposition of the *shari’at* rule, and the royal chroniclers tried to give Islamic garb to a politically expedient action.” In later years, destruction of places of worship and imposition of the protection tax (*jizya*) on non-Muslims and the forcible conversion into Islam were common features of the rule even though all this distorted the social structure as envisioned by their prophet. Such oppressive policies resulted in persecution of non-Muslims, creating among masses a sense of discrimination and hatred. The Sufis did make attempts, quite feeble though, at creating an atmosphere of inter-religious goodwill. However, the entry of Islam into India has, on the whole, been marked by an ugly recurrence of religious intolerance and persecution.

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, happened to be an eyewitness to Babar’s invasion and the suffering caused in its wake. He protests in his hymns, collectively known as *Babar Vani*, against this uncalled for death and destruction. In another hymn, Guru Nanak wants those desirous of treading the path of love to be ever ready to sacrifice their head. Thus, from its very infancy Sikhism has stood for truth, for righteousness and exhorted its followers to fight against those who subvert the truth. The Sikh scripture, on the whole, articulates the general framework of structure within which the ideal of social reformation is to be realized. It is also normative in that it serves as the basis of the code of conduct and ethics for the followers. The latter together constitute the Sikh way of life, and one such constituent prescribed is that this world being the dwelling-place of God be transformed into *Sach Khand*, where the values of equality, love, justice and dignity prevail; the devotees must neither put others to fear nor own to anybody's fear, and they must not shrink from making

the supreme sacrifice in a holy cause. The death of heroic men is holy, should they lay down their lives for a righteous cause, says Guru Nanak. At another place in the scripture, Kabir reiterates the same idea in a little different way as he says:

*Gagan damama bajio pario nisane ghao.
Khet jo mandio surama ab jujhan ko dau;
Sura so pahichaniai ju lare din ke het,
Purja purja kti marai kabahu na chhade khetu.*

The hero, entering the field,
Fights on without quailing,
Know that man to be a true hero
Who fights in defence of the defenceless;
Hacked limb by limb, he still flees not the field.

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 1005

One of the concluding verses of *Chandi Charitra Ukti Bilas* seeks the divine boon to ever do noble deeds and be able to lay down his life for the sake righteousness:

*Deh siva baru mohi ibai subh karman te kabahun na taron,
Na daro ari so jab jai laron nischai kari apuni jit karon
Ar sikhaho apane hi mana ko ih lalach hau gun tau ucharo,
Jab av ki audh nidan banai ati hi ran mai tab jujh maron.*

Lord, Grant me this boon:
Never may I turn back from righteousness;
May I never turn back in fear when facing the foe;
May I ever instruct my mind to chant Thy praises;
And when the end arrives,
May I fall fighting on the field of battle.

To stand up for a righteous cause, to stand up in the defence of the hapless and defenceless, to be willing to make even the supreme sacrifice for a cause held dear by a fellow citizen - all this requires a lot of courage and fearlessness. The scripture repeatedly exhorts man to be fearless and give up cowardice. Guru Gobind Singh, in another of his works, reiterates:

*Dhanni jio tih jo jag mai, muh te hari chit mai judhu bicharai;
Deh anit na nit rahai, jasu-nav charai bhav sagar tarai;
Dhiraj dham banai ibai tan, budhi su dipak jiu ujarai;*

Gianahi ki badhani manahu bath lai, katarta kutvar buharai.

Blessed, he who has God on his lips,
 And contemplates war in mind;
 The perishable body will not last,
 Man should sail through on the boat of divine eulogy;
 His body the home of spiritual poise,
 His mind aglow like a lamp lit;
 With the broom of God-realization,
 Should he sweep away the dust of cowardice.

Thus, in Sikhism, one is required to give up all cowardice, be brave and courageous enough to stand up against all kinds of injustice, oppression and highhandedness. One must be willing to suffer privation and even meet death fighting against these and such other evils, with no personal motive or interest attached to that fight. In fact, true martyrdom, in Sikhism, lies in the willingness to suffer without flinching. Guru Nanak and his successors prepared their disciples for this with a view to erecting a social setup where values of equality and love, justice and tolerance, compassion and self-respect prevail.

History provided first such opportunity in the Sikh tradition when Jahangir ascended the throne of Delhi. He succeeded Akbar (1542-1605 CE) who was known for his liberal religious policy and the Sikh chronicles also refer to his amicable relations with the Sikh Gurus. However, Jahangir was not as liberal and tolerant, and he soon got alarmed by the growing influence of Guru Arjun as he wrote in his *Tuzk*:

So many of the simple-minded Hindus, nay, many foolish Muslims too, had been fascinated by the Guru's ways and teaching. For many years the thought had been presenting itself to my mind that either I should put an end to this false traffic or that he be brought into the fold of Islam.

He goes on to say :

I fully knew of his heresies, and I ordered that he should be brought into my presence, that his property be confiscated and that he should be put to death with torture.

Sikhism, the youngest of the major religions of the world, tends to accept the plurality of faiths, acknowledges the validity of all of them, and rejects the claim of monopoly over truth by any particular

religion. It states quite unequivocally that revelation is not religion-specific, region-specific or person-specific. It stands for the freedom of man to practice the faith of his choice. This ideology of the Sikh Gurus was contrary to that of religious intolerance and persecution followed by Jahangir and later on by his successor, Aurangzeb.

Clearly, this was the time for Guru Arjun (1563-1606 CE) to bear witness to the truth of his faith and to his own unswerving commitment and allegiance to it. Guru Arjun stood for the religious freedom of man and refused to renounce his faith in favour of Islam. He willingly offered himself to suffer any privation, and even meet death, for upholding his principles. As a contemporary Christian missionary records, this 'good Pope' "died, overwhelmed by the sufferings, torments, dishonours" heaped on him by a fanatic ruler. Thus, Guru Arjun became the first martyr of the Sikh faith.

When Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675 CE) assumed the spiritual leadership of the Sikh faith in 1664 CE, India was ruled by Emperor Aurangzeb. A pious man in his personal life, Aurangzeb was an orthodox Muslim who had waded through a river of blood to reach the throne: he had to imprison his father and kill his brothers to get the crown. He followed a fanatical religious policy to appease and please the Muslim orthodoxy. He decreed "to destroy with a willing hand the schools and temples of the infidels and put an entire stop to their religious practices and teachings" (1669) and imposed *jizya*, a tax non-Muslim population had to pay for permission to live in an Islamic State (1679). There were many more such edicts which aimed at humiliating the non-Muslims. Though Aurangzeb had nothing personal against Guru Tegh Bahadur, and he never made any direct reference to him, yet both of them stood clearly for ideals in stark opposition to each other. Guru Tegh Bahadur could not bear the persecution of others and he seems to have made up his mind to resist the Emperor's policy of religious persecution and even to lay down his life to redeem the freedom of belief.

The decisive moment came in 1675 when some Kashmiri pandits waited upon the Guru at Anandpur. They had come to the Guru to complain against Iftikhar Khan, Aurangzeb's satrap in Kashmir, who was making *en masse* conversions to Islam through the use of force. The Guru listened to their woes and resolved to take upon himself the onus of defending their right to religious practice and belief. He

advised them to tell the authority in Delhi that if the Guru was converted, they would all voluntarily accept Islam. Resolved to challenge the royal policy of religious exclusivism and intolerance, the Guru on his own set out for Delhi. Although the Guru was himself leading to Delhi, the authorities arrested him on the way, put him in chains and brought him to Delhi. His refusal to renounce his faith resulted in his public execution in Chandni Chowk on 11th November, 1675. However, before beheading him, three of his devoted followers were also tortured to death before his eyes.

Thus, Guru Tegh Bahadur took up cudgels on behalf of the hapless Hindus on his own; it was more for redeeming freedom of faith for people irrespective of the religious tradition they belonged to. In the Indian history and folklore, he has always been remembered as the protector of the Hindu faith - a unique example of its kind in the history of mankind. Interestingly, there are several Sikh scriptural hymns criticizing *janeu* and *tilak* which the Brahmanical class had begun to consider an end in themselves, thus giving precedence to form over the spirit of religion, but the Guru stood for freedom of belief and practice for everyone. The religious history of mankind provides no second example of a spiritual leader laying down his life for the people belonging to a religious tradition other than his own. Second, the Sikh Gurus had nothing against Islam as such, and the Sikh scripture unequivocally states that the scriptures of neither the Indian nor Semitic religions can be called false, rather false are those who do not reflect on them. Had the contemporary political situation in India been the other way round, Guru Tegh Bahadur would surely have made the same sacrifice for the sake of Muslims.

The resolution by the Guru to court martyrdom was deliberate and conscious, and the authorities intervened only after he took up the challenge to undo both the evil as evil and the suffering of evil as such: the authorities felt his teachings were strengthening among people the resolve, the determination to suffer hardship and even death rather than give up their faith under coercion. It was a peculiar situation of self-prompted and meaningful suffering for the sake of others but to uphold a cherished ideal. The Guru remained in perfect poise throughout his resolve, and his spiritual state reflecting full faith in God's will can well be imagined from a close reading of the *slokas* he is

believed to have composed during the days of his captivity in Delhi. The followers who had accompanied the Guru to Delhi retained their unflinching faith in the Guru and his ideals till they were put to cruel death before the Guru's own eyes. This was like a true martyr who must meet his end in perfect poise. Interestingly, even the *New Testament* (John 12) while referring to Jesus' mental state on the eve of his crucifixion says that his heart felt 'troubled' and Jesus himself calls it 'an hour of suffering'. Thus, Guru Tegh Bahadur and his disciples who courted death along with him became the next martyrs of the Sikh faith. No doubt, the sacrifice made by Guru Tegh Bahadur is without any parallels in human history. *Bachitra Natak* (V: 14-16) also testifies to it :

 Their *tilak* and *janju* the Lord saved;
 Great deed the Guru performed in the *kaliyuga*;

 For *dharmā's* sake he performed this deed;
 He gave away his head, but not his resolve;

 Breaking the potsherd of body at Delhi king's head,
 Left he for the Realm Celestial;
 None else performed the kind of deed
 As did Guru Tegh Bahadur.

Guru Gobind Singh, members of his family and his numerous Sikhs underwent much suffering and privation in their fight against the bigotry of the Mughal government and the fanatical Rajput hill chiefs. Two of his younger sons preferred death to making compromises with the truth of their faith. Their passionate adherence to it even at such a young age makes their martyrdom all the more significant. Soon thereafter, the elder two sons of the Guru laid down their lives fighting against the Mughal hordes at Chamkaur. Like their father and younger brothers, they preferred death to compromising with bigotry and intolerance. The Sikh history thereafter has a long tradition of martyrdom – Sikhs suffered privation and even met death, but remained committed to the truth of their faith, to the values their Gurus stood for.

THE CONCEPT OF MARTYRDOM AND SIKHISM

HAKAM SINGH*

Martyrdom in its purest form is voluntary, conscious and altruistic readiness to suffer and offer one's life for a cause¹. It means that no fear or material inducement underlie as the driving factors in such extreme sacrifice of life.

Etymologically the word martyr (or martyrdom) is derived from the Greek word *martyros* which means 'witness'. Martyrdom is thus the supreme witness to the truth of faith - bearing witness to the faith even unto death. A martyr is one who accepts death with courage as a witness to his faith believing it to be the most noble of all human endeavors.

The idea of martyrdom (or martyr) has been around since time immemorial. However, the word and its present connotation date to the Judeo-Christian era. Even before the Judeo-Christian times people were called upon to die for their beliefs, and they did, but the awe and respect associated with this kind of death developed only after the establishment of organized religion which propounded the idea of heaven and hell as potential reward or punishment in the hereafter for one's behavior here. That is probably the reason why the concept of martyrdom has been mostly associated with religion (although recently it has been used in connection with sacrifices for political causes as well).

Among the different faiths in the world, the Semitic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) adopted the idea of martyrdom. However, the motivating factors and, to some extent, the concept itself were modified by each faith to suit its respective doctrines. The earlier religions spreading in the East (Hinduism and Buddhism) do not seem to have accepted this idea. Sikhism, the youngest of all the major

religions of the world, is the only religion originating in India, which has adopted the concept of martyrdom. It is therefore interesting to see how this concept has been understood and practised by each faith.

Buddhism: Buddhism neither believes in heaven and hell, nor does it profess violence (it believes in *ahimsa*), therefore, the idea of martyrdom in any form is completely absent in this faith.

Hinduism: Hinduism does believe in heaven and hell, reward and punishment according to one's actions and it does not believe in non-violence. But the concept of martyrdom seems to be absent in this faith. Sanskrit, the language of ancient Vedic (Hindu) religion does not even have a word equivalent or close to martyrdom. Only recently the semantic range of the term *balidan* has been expanded to bring it close to this concept. Various scholars have tried to find an explanation to this and come up with different answers. For example, Swami Ram Tirath thinks that in Hinduism human life was considered as a gift from God and, therefore, too sacred to be glorified when sacrificed for any human endeavor.

Judaism: In Judaism, the interpretation of the concept of martyrdom seems to be somewhat different from other Semitic faiths. It simply means “standing up to the principles of faith, even when one has to face hardships and oppression.” The famous episode of ‘Masada’ where all Jews preferred to commit suicide rather than boldly fight the enemy in the battlefield, amply illustrates this point.

Christianity: The inception of Christianity came as a result of death, by torture, of Jesus Christ. This event is considered by the followers of this faith as the highest act of martyrdom. Christianity is thus predicated around the concept of triumphing over death as Jesus did. Under such circumstances it stands to reason why the concept of dying for one's religion would be given so much importance. Thus by fourth century (CE) the idea of dying for Jesus Christ had morphed into the idea of martyrdom in which dying for one's faith was considered not just a duty (because it was emulating Jesus) but an honour and a privilege.

This simplistic explanation, however, ignores one important psychological reason for exaltation of such a death to such a high level. Among Christians it is a firm belief that Jesus sacrificed his life

to wash off the sins committed by humanity through Adam. Thus he is responsible for interceding between God and the faithful (atonement). All a believer has to do is to confirm faith in Jesus, and he shall have a seat reserved for him in heaven. Psychologically, it introduces a guilt complex (all Christians are indebted to Jesus for what he did and what he will do for them in the hereafter) which is the driving force for Christians to emulate Jesus Christ and embrace martyrdom.

Islam: With the beginning of Islam came the Arabic word *shahada* or *shahadat* which is conceptually similar to the word martyrdom, but has even broader meaning. It means to see, to witness, to testify or to become a role model. This word is inseparably associated with the Islamic concept of *jehad* or holy struggle. A *shahid* (*shabeed*) is, therefore, a person who in struggle (*jehad*) witnesses the truth and stands by it firmly to the extent that not only he testifies to it verbally but is prepared to fight for the truth and, if necessary, give up his life and thus become a role model for others.²

In essence, according to Islam, martyrdom applies only when it is preceded by *jehad* which is an inclusive struggle for the truth (the way the truth is interpreted in this faith). A person involved in *jehad* (a *mujahid*) always dies the death of a martyr even if he does not fall on the battlefield, as long as he stays loyal to the truth and stays ready to fight for and defend the truth at all costs.

Now, truth according to a majority of Islamic fundamentalist theologians is the moral obligation of every Muslim to *jehad* which they define 'to expand the scope of Islam, even by the use of force (sword)'. According to this view, martyrdom is associated with even forcible conversion of or death to the infidel, which is the highest privilege of Islam.³ Some relevant quotes from *Quran* are summarized as follows in order to substantiate this point.

1. Any religion other than Islam is not acceptable.⁴
2. If you do not fight in the cause of God with whatever you have got, then God will inflict serious punishment on you.⁵
3. If you fight for God then expect either martyrdom or paradise.

The rewards promised to a *shabeed* by Islam are:

1. Forgiveness with the first drop of his spilt blood.

2. A guaranteed place in paradise with a celestial crown on his head.
3. Availability of seventy-two virgins.
4. Authority to intercede for seventy-two of his relatives.

The picture of paradise painted in Islam is much more carnal than in Christianity and it gives impetus to the urge to attain martyrdom.

The question arises, if a reward is offered for any act, even if it is the sacrifice of one's own life, the sanctity attached to it by religion is downgraded to a promise of payment of a certain amount in the hereafter for performing an act here. In this world today there are many who are ready to carry out a mission in which the odds of losing life are overwhelming, in return for payment of an appropriate sum of money. No one would call the death of such a mercenary, martyrdom.

Sikhism: Sikhism elevated the concept of martyrdom to new heights when Guru Nanak, the first prophet said:

ਜਉ ਤਉ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਖੇਲਣ ਕਾ ਚਾਉ ॥ ਸਿਰੁ ਧਰਿ ਤਲੀ ਗਲੀ ਮੇਰੀ ਆਉ ॥
ਇਤੁ ਮਾਰਗਿ ਪੈਰੁ ਧਰੀਜੈ ॥ ਸਿਰੁ ਦੀਜੈ ਕਾਣਿ ਨ ਕੀਜੈ ॥

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1412

Should you have an urge to play the game of love,
step into my lane with your head placed on your palm.
Once embarked on this path,
Hesitate not to sacrifice your head.

Guru Nanak did not offer any rewards or enticements for playing the game of love even at the cost of one's life. Also, there is no guilt complex among Sikhs because none of the Sikh Gurus gave any promise of intercession for any one who expressed unconditional full faith in Sikhism. Whatever one sows, so does he reap:

ਜੇਹਾ ਬੀਜੈ ਸੇ ਲੁਣੈ ਕਰਮਾ ਸੰਦੜਾ ਖੇਤੁ ॥ – Guru Granth Sahib, p. 134

Also,

ਅਹਿ ਕਰੁ ਕਰੇ ਸੁ ਅਹਿ ਕਰੁ ਪਾਏ ਕੋਈ ਨ ਪਕੜੀਐ ਕਿਸੈ ਥਾਇ ॥

– Guru Granth Sahib, p. 406

“(in this age of Kali) One gets retribution for what one does.
No one gets caught in anyone else's place”.

Furthermore, Sikhism does not believe in sinful birth of human beings. Love for God and Guru or staying steadfastly on the path that leads to the supreme reality is something that is beyond the idea of

any rewards corresponding to attainment of paradise full of virgins.

Sikh history is full of examples where all kinds of worldly rewards and even promises of paradise (after death) were offered, but the Sikh martyrs summarily rejected them for the sake of love for their Guru and God.

The first martyr in Sikh history is the fifth Guru, Guru Arjun Dev. The only reliable source of the account of his martyrdom is the diary of the then emperor of India, *Tuzk-i-Jehangiri*. Referring to the seat of Sikh Guru Arjun Dev at Goindwal, Jehangir writes:

“For years the thought had been presenting to my mind that I should put an end to this false traffic or he (the Guru) should be brought into the fold of Islam.”

Guru Arjun, according to Jehangir, was calling himself religious as well as worldly leader and because of his ways and teachings, was attracting many simple-minded Hindus and many foolish Muslims also.” Therefore, on some flimsy grounds, he was arrested and put through some of the most inhuman tortures (setting on a hot plate, putting in a cauldron of boiling water and pouring hot sand on his body) until his demise. The writing in the diary indicates that Guru Arjun Dev was probably given a choice to convert to Islam in order to escape all the torture, which the Guru rejected.

The records of martyrdom of the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, are available in relatively greater details.⁷ He sacrificed his life not for his own faith, but in order to defend the rights of religious freedom of Hindus. He is thus the apostle of Human Rights who stood up against a tyrannical regime that was hell-bent upon converting its majority subjects by oppression to its own faith.

Bachittar Natak, a chapter in the *Dasam Granth* eloquently describes the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur:

“The Lord (Guru Tegh Bahadur) protected their sacred thread and the holy frontal mark.

In the age of *Kali* he performed a great deed.

He gave away his head but did not utter a groan.

To uphold the truth he enacted a fantastic deed.

He sacrificed his life but not his principles.”

There are innumerable examples of martyrdom by Sikhs in the relatively short span of their history. Starting with Bhai Mati Das,

Bhai Sati Das and Bhai Dayal Das, the companions of Guru Tegh Bahadur, who were martyred mercilessly to scare Guru Tegh Bahadur, so that he would accept the conditions laid down by the emperor, Aurangzeb and convert to Islam. The tradition of martyrdom has since continued till recent times without any abatement and will continue as long as there are adherents to the words of Guru Nanak living in this world.

Some of the most notable names of Sikh martyrs that come to mind are:

The four sons of Guru Gobind Singh.

The three of the five Beloved ones.

The forty Muktas.

Banda Singh Bahadur.

Bhai Mani Singh.

Baba Deep Singh.

Bhai Bota Singh and Bhai Garja Singh.

Bhai Taru Singh.

Bhai Lachhman Singh and Bhai Dalip Singh.

These are examples of knowingly and voluntarily sacrificing their lives for altruistic causes and noble ends. This makes their martyrdom pristine.

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## REFERENCES AND NOTES

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2. Emperor Aurangzeb and Osama Bin Laden belong to the category of zealots who seem to firmly believe in this idea.
3. Holy *Quran*, *Sura* 3, verse 85.
4. Ibid, *Sura* 9, verses 38, 39 and 41.
5. Ibid, *Sura* 9, verse 52.
6. *The Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion*; Ed. Robert Wuthnow, 1998; p. 404-97.
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## MARTYRDOM – THE FATAL ATTRACTION

GAJINDAR SINGH\*

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### Introduction

Today, we assemble here in impressive strength to pay our homage to our great men and women, elderly and children, our youth, who gave up their lives, their youthful desires and wishes of living normal lives, for their Sikh Ideals, so that we may live proudly and gather the fruits of their sacrifices. Let us hand over this heritage to the coming generations with the same vigour with which those martyrs handed the high fluttering flag to us.

It is generally held that the institution of martyrdom in Sikhism started with the execution of Guru Arjun Dev, who is hailed as the First Martyr in the cause of Sikh faith and the progenitor of the tradition of mortification and executions. In Sikhism, however, physical happenings do not formulate the principles as the moralist and the historian would argue. It is, rather, the ethical principles placed in perspective on which the Sikhs were expected to walk the fiery path in order to demonstrate the soundness of their theory and the spiritual ascendancy in observing those lofty principles. Guru Arjun Dev followed the legacy of the Sikh faith as enunciated by Guru Nanak in the game of divine love.

*It marg peir dhrijay, Sir deeje kan na keejay.*

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1412

If you enter this path, Put your head on stake,  
Do not back out!

### Definition of Sacrifice

The idea of sacrifice is distinct from the principle of martyrdom, *shabadat*. The ritual of sacrifice is an ancient act of religiosity which



has been present in a different context in the Indian thought, but in its present form, it was mooted by Guru Nanak. Till then, the Indian thrust was on sacrifice as an invocation. The rationale of sacrifice was personal. The brave man dashed out to fight and die to become *amar*, immortal. The woman committed *satti* as a sacred duty of her widowed state to gain benefits in her next incarnation. One sacrificed his body in a religious frenzy because he expected thereby to gain spiritually. The *satta* and the *tantric* invoking the black powers of Sakti offered, as a sacrifice, the innocent child or adult, luring him to the venue of sacrifice for attaining personal gains in the present life as well as in future. These practices which are still part of the curriculum of many sects were rejected outright by the Guru as of no avail in gaining spiritual or physical strength or mundane benefits.

*Nimakh nimakh kar sreer katave,*

*Tau bhi haume mail n jave.*

– *Sukhmani*, Guru Granth Sahib, p 265

Limb by limb getting his body dismembered,

Still he sheds not I-consciousness, the ego.

### The Sikh Viewpoint

There are many references in the Guru Granth Sahib about the fatal attraction of the Unknown. For example, one of the oft-repeated similes is the helplessness of the Bumble-bee for the Lotus flower. Bees are known to be enchanted by the colour and smell of flowers. They waft from one flower to the other, fully enthralled by the colourful display in front of their eyes. While the bumble-bee is inextricably lost in its admiration of the beauty of a lotus, the petals of the flower slowly close in around it, time-bound with the fading light of the setting sun. The bumble-bee chokes to death, entrapped in the innocent-looking soft petals of lotus flower. It is up to each person to ascribe motives to the attraction of the bee for the flower, for this tragic outcome of their relationship.

*Bhanr ek puph ras bidha, bareh Ie urdhariya*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 970

Bumble-bee is lured with the juices of the flower,

Intoxicated entirely with its twelve petals.

And,

*Jam mag badha kbahi chota sabd bin betaliya,  
Sach kabe Nanak chet re man mareh bhawra kaliya.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 439

Nanak says the truth! Remember the Lord.

Ensnared and tossed by a death trap, Without the True Word,  
There dies the black bumble-bee.

Another simile mentioned in the Sikh parlance is of equally emotional attachment of the moth with the slim tongue of the flame of a candle. While wildly circling round and round the fire, it is indeed surprising that the moth does not bother about the heat, but keeps girdling closer and closer in a death dance till it is terribly hurt, its wings singed beyond repair. Very often, it drops into the hot liquid and is roasted alive as the point of fire stoops low to consume it and to resume its slim glow. It is also up to the imagination of the viewer to impute its motive for the suicidal, fatal act.

*Poche patang, mrig, bhring, kunchar  
meen lk indri pakar siare.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 983

The burnt moth, the deer,  
The bumble-bee, the elephant, the fish,  
All are caught in a single emotional trap.

Indian thinkers always forcefully draw a moral from these instances that it is the greed of illusion, of beauty of Maya and its *rajo* and *tamo guna* aspects which suck out the lives of these deeply engrossed creatures without their realizing the enormous stakes of their motivation. They would conclude that one must not always get closely involved in such false attractions. Yet another view could be the single-minded commitment to the Cause, to remain unmindful of the consequences of such a love-game.

In Indian poetical and religious rhapsody, each and every relationship is directed towards the tentacles of Maya, the Grand Illusion, whether it is the bee and the flower, the fish and its insatiability with the water, the moth and the flame, or the helplessness of the mighty elephant in the grip of its great sexual urge.

Our Gurus made full use of these subjects to illustrate the motif

of spiritual urge over the material thrust. One can cite innumerable passages in Guru Granth Sahib in this vein. But the moral of such examples has been, always, to clarify the futility of a self-centered sacrifice.

*Bhavr bhavanta phuli dati kionjiva mar mae,  
Nanak chaf sehj sukh pave je Hari var ghar dhan pae.*

Guru Granth Sahib, p 1108

The bumble bee loiters among all flowery branches,  
O mother, how would it attain the state of salvation?  
It is by attaining poise in constant remembrance of God  
If the bride achieves the abode of the divine Husband.

### **Martyrdom**

With the influx of the Islamic Sufism, the intent and purpose of the self-sacrifice of these ancient metaphors underwent a wide change. The personal edge to the ritualistic sacrifice was replaced by the total abandonment of the lover for the object of love as an act of obliteration. It also created a dual interpretation of the simile, equally fit for materialistic meanings as well as the spiritual inspiration drawn from the same couplet by the viewer. The meaning and the understanding was no more confined to the direction as given by the poet himself, but was dependent on the spiritual awakening and status of the reader or listener who ascetically moved from the mundane to the finer religious fervour. Each couplet served to tingle the aspirations of a person in its *mijazī* contours, leading him to more subtle meanings of the *haqiqi* content. It thus brought an improvement into the faculties of awareness and understanding of a person. The moth did not remain an illusion-entrapped identity, but graduated to the selfless role of a martyr (*shahed*) to the cause of pure love, willing to and actually getting burnt in its urge to kiss the fiery lips of the flame. Similarly, the bee was no longer the pleasure-seeking usurper of taste and colour, but ready to get choked to death in its fatal embrace of the flower without the least hesitation. Embracing annihilation became a worthy cause, for the doctrine of Janna was popularized by the Sufis who emboldened the lover in man to emulate the cause of martyrdom for its fancy and satisfaction. Martyrdom of Sufi concept was far superior to the status

of a *ghazi* in Islam as the Sufi martyr sought nothing in lieu of his unbounded love and total devotion for the beloved, which was God. This zeal was admired by Guru Nanak who infused that spirit in the Sikhs who complied with the requirements of love like the moth, the bee and without the Guru felt like fish out of water. They desired nothing in return.

The division of the society between the purity of swans and the incredulity of the crane was thus narrowed to the will of the man to achieve highest spiritual inspiration by infusing the zeal to perish for a beloved. The beloved was the Guru and God. The test of readiness was the extent of the desire for sacrifice of a person in his love of God. As mentioned above, in India, many devotees would cut off their limbs, tongues and even heads to propitiate the deity, but always linked to a cause like seeking more magical powers and spiritual efficacy for personal aggrandizement. Guru Nanak favoured the spiritual urge of the selfless zealots of the Sufi bent, to bear sacrifice in the way of God, without any present benefits or future rewards, not even of the permanent attractive heavenly abode full of milk and honey and beautiful damsels, virgins ever youthful. It was total submersion in the love of God :

*Raj n chabon, mukt n chabon,  
Man preet charn kamlare.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 534

I seek not material ascendancy, nor spiritual salvation,  
I ask only for the love supreme of the lotus feet of God.

Guru Nanak gave the call to the Sikhs repeatedly to be ever prepared to offer themselves as sacrifice in the way of God, by translating sacrifice from the physical plane to spiritual, where the individual ego was totally extinct. Sikhs were to give up their soul, their possessions and their bodies in the cause of God.

*Haon kurbane jaon mehravana haon kurbane jaon,  
Haon kurbane jaon tina ke lenn jo tera naon,  
Lenn jo tera naon tina ke haon sadd kurbane jaon.*

– Guru Granth Sahib, p 721

Oblation to them, a Divine Benefactor!  
I am a sacrifice to them, Benediction to them, who

Meditate on Your Name, Those who worship You,  
 Let me be a sacrifice to them, A hundred times over.

The Sikhs who came forward voluntarily were not only from the province of Punjab or village folk or city dwellers, not only the war-like Jats or the high caste Khatri traders, but those who had been abandoned as the very scum of the society, who were not supposed to have any finer emotional tinge, like the Sikligars, the Vanjaras and Satnami tribes, whom Guru Nanak had given the precious gift of *Naam*. They excelled with the spirit of Sikhism and became invincible, breaking the myth of martial clan, class or race. Those selfless souls were the great martyrs like Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Bachittar Singh and Bhai Baz Singh, to name only a few. When we pay our respectful obeisance to our illustrious martyrs, let us consider, if we are today taking care of these beloved Gursikhs and their descendants who are living in total penury and decadence, discarded by generations of their race-conscious and caste-proud Sikh brethren and left to the schemes of eager missionaries of other religious creeds.

### **Sahibzadas and Martyrdom**

The martyrdoms of Guru Arjun Dev and of Guru Tegh Bahadur sharpened into focus as they offered themselves for the supreme sacrifice willingly, rejecting offers of mediation by the concerned Sikhs. Then there were scores of Sikhs of Guru Hargobind who died in battles, in unequal combat with crack troops of the Empire. By the time of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Master, the tradition of martyrdom as *fidayeen* was fully established. Scores of Sikhs had mentally prepared themselves for martyrdom like the steadfast companions of Guru Tegh Bahadur who were inhumanly tortured but stood by him and died in his presence, like Bhais Mati Das, Sati Das and Dayal ji. The last wish of Bhai Mati Das was to be sawn into two while gazing at his Master, Guru Tegh Bahadur.

With such noble traditions, the *Sahibzadas* of the Tenth Guru were fired by the lofty ideals which had firmly gripped the entire community of the Sikhs who collected eagerly under the flag and drums of Guru Gobind Singh. The main body of the troops of the Guru was not composed of mercenaries and spoilers, but highly committed

and spiritually charged volunteers, willing to be sacrificed for the sake of the lofty ideals of Guru Nanak, infused by Guru Gobind Singh. His *Sahibzadas* were cast in the same mould and enthused for righteous action. It goes to the credit of Guru Gobind Singh as a father to groom all his sons into the fine discipline of spiritual excellence. They were conscious of the historical implications of their positions and exigencies of the times they lived in. When the occasion came for their act of faith, all of them embraced death eagerly and willingly. It was the ultimate overtone of spirituality over the lure of materialism.

The *Sahibzadas* had normal childhood and cherished ideas and dreams of living eventful lives. Ajit Singh, the eldest of the *Sahibzadas*, had taken part in battles and skirmishes from the tender age of twelve and won them. He was, therefore, not a novice to face hordes of enemy at Chamkaur. He sailed forth out of the mud fortress, fully trained and with full understanding of his impending martyrdom, as fully comprehending as his illustrious grandfather, Guru Tegh Bahadur had, while setting forth to face the might of the Mughal power. He volunteered to go to battle while there were few brave Sikhs still left for the mortal combat. Five Sikh warriors accompanied him and they together not only held the vast army at bay, but killed many of them till one by one, they were overwhelmed and cut down. Guru Gobind Singh watched the scene from the heights of the *garhi*, and admired the passion and the tactics, which Sahibzada Ajit Singh exhibited. There had been a strict regime of training and exercises for his sons which were now being displayed in front of him. Sahibzada Ajit Singh was followed by Sahibzada Jujhar Singh, only twelve years of age, properly trained in the art of warfare and strenuous exercises held regularly at Anadgarh Fort were now put to a practical test.

In the martyrdom of the *Sahibzadas*, an important point was demonstrated that it was not only the valour with which the young boys fought, which was the core issue. It was the readiness of Guru Gobind Singh to sacrifice his own sons with as much equanimity as he had for the loyal devotees. By accepting the requests of his sons to let them go and face the angry hordes thirsting for their blood, he showed no partiality between the Sikhs and his sons. Another point which stands out clearly is the spirit which Guru Gobind Singh had infused

in his followers and the glory of the cause which bore the young *Sahibzadas* to face sure death.

It is mostly the names of Sahibzada Ajit Singh and Baba Fateh Singh which are commonly mentioned. It does not mean that the other two, namely, Sahibzadas Jujhar Singh and Zorawar Singh had not contributed similarly to the history. In fact Sahibzada Jujhar Singh, aged twelve could have been easily excused from the battle of Chamkaur due to his tender age while veterans were still available to wage the unequal struggle. But he volunteered amid protests of the Sikhs there and was granted permission of his father to sail forth.

The two younger Sahibzadas, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, hardly about 8 and 6 years of age, had a very different experience and the taste of severe intimidation at the Court of the Nawab Wazir Khan of Sirhind. They were very small children, who did not have the benefit of the presence of their illustrious father with them at the time of their questioning and pressure of the full court, coaxing and cajoling to accept the terms of the *Subedar* to abjure their father's faith and convert to the tenets of the ruling faith of Islam. The only guidance they had was of their grandmother, imprisoned in the misty Thanda Burj, but they had to face by themselves the awesome wrath of the State determined to curb and shatter their resistance, where many stalwarts would have shaken with fright.

In my childhood, mothers used to cite the example of the *Sahibzadas* whenever the child injured himself in a fall or was pained and hurt by things lying in his way. The hurt and the pain was waived off by imagining the horrible tortures experienced by the young *Sahibzadas*, the like of whom at that tender age are learning to play ball, are heavily protected by the willing arms of their parents and others nearby and are learning nursery rhymes or live through the usual pranks of the teenagers. Sikhism has a long queue of martyrs who were inspired by the example of the *Sahibzadas* to volunteer to death.

In every movement which creates a new nation, the edifice is built with the blood of martyrs who suffer tortures and death, unmindful of consequences like Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Taru, Bhais Sukha Singh, Mehtab Singh and the unending line of martyrs, or perish like Baba Deep Singh in unequal combat with forces of oppression.

Thus the first wave of the believers lays down life at the altar of the faith. Let us not forget them while we, as the following generation, reap the fruits of their bloody struggle, snuggling in our comfort. In due course, let not the awesome contribution of the martyrs shrink to mumbling just a lip service, until the historical events jolt us to revive their memories and achievements.

The footprints left by the tender-aged *Sahibzadas* have moved and electrified a whole society, a nation and prepared scores of Sikhs for facing gallows, to stand up for their convictions based on whole truth and made them go through with the cruelest methods adopted by the barbaric and criminalised regimes successively of the Mughals, the British and the Indian State, which is being celebrated as the golden ages of Indian civilisation by the present-day historians, basing their inquiry on partial accounts of those government records and the court script writers who have preferred the luxury of state patronage and dared not to speak the truth. The grand stand of the *Sahibzadas* must be vividly retold to inspire generations of Sikh youth by utilization of the latest gadgets of audio-visual systems which will surely continue to move young and old to be sacrifice to God and the Guru for the noble precepts of their faith and the commonweal of the World.



