

Nanak X. Guru Gobind Singh ji(1666 - 1708)



The tenth and the last Guru or Prophet-teacher of the Sikh faith, was born Gobind Rai Sodhi on Poh 7, 1723 sk/22 December 1666 at Patna, in Bihar. His father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Guru, was then travelling across Bengal and Assam. Returning to Patna in 1670, he directed his family to return to the Punjab. On the site of the house at Patna in which Gobind Rai was born and where he spent his early childhood now stands a sacred shrine, Takht Sri Harimandar Sahib, one of the five most honoured seats of religious authority (takht, lit. throne) for the Sikhs. Gobind Rai was escorted to Anandpur (then

known as Chakk Nanaki) on the foothills of the Sivaliks where he reached in March 1672 and where his early education included reading and writing of Punjabi, Braj, Sanskrit and Persian. He was barely nine years of age when a sudden turn came in his life as well as in the life of the community he was destined to lead. Early in 1675, [a group Kashmiri Brahmans](#), driven to desperation by the religious fanaticism of the Mughals General, Iftikar Khan, visited Anandpur to seek Guru Tegh Bahadur's intercession. As the Guru sat reflecting what to do, young Gobind Rai, arriving there in company with his playmates, asked Why he looked so preoccupied. The father, as records Kuir Singh in his Gurbilas Patshahi 10, replied, "Grave are the burdens the earth bears. She will be redeemed only if a truly worthy person comes forward to lay down his head. Distress will then be expunged and happiness ushered in." "None could be worthier than yourself to make such a sacrifice," remarked Gobind Rai in his innocent manner. Guru Tegh Bahadur soon afterwards proceeded to the imperial capital, Delhi, and courted death on 11 November 1675.

Guru Gobind Singh was formally installed Guru on the Baisakhi day of 1733 Bk/29 March 1676. In the midst of his engagement with the concerns of the community, he gave attention to the mastery of physical skills and literary accomplishment. He had grown into a comely youth spare, lithe of limb and



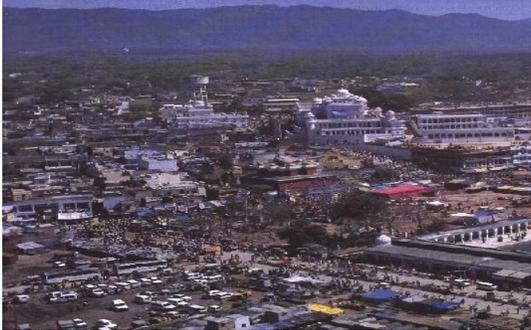
energetic. He had a natural genius for poetic composition and his early years were assiduously given to this pursuit. The *Var Sri Bhagauti Ji Ki*, popularly called *Chandi di Var*, written in

1684, was his first composition and his only major work in the Punjabi language. The poem depicted the legendary contest between the gods and the demons as described in the *Markandeya Purana*. The choice of a warlike theme for this and a number of his later compositions such as the two *Chandi Charitras*, mostly in Braj, was made to infuse martial spirit among his followers to prepare them to stand up against injustice and tyranny.

Much of Guru Gobind Singh's creative literary work was done at Paonta he had founded on the banks of the River Yamuna and to which site he had temporarily shifted in April 1685. Poetry as such was, however, not his aim. For him it was a means of revealing the divine principle and concretizing a personal vision of the Supreme Being that had been vouchsafed to him. His Japu and the composition known as Akal Ustati are in this tenor. Through his poetry he preached love and equality and a strictly ethical and moral code of conduct. He preached the worship of the One Supreme Being, deprecating idolatry and superstitious beliefs and observances. The glorification of the sword itself which he eulogized as *Bhaguati* was to secure fulfilment of God's justice. The sword was never meant as a symbol of aggression, and it was never to be used for self-aggrandizement. It was the emblem of manliness and self-respect and was to be used only in self-defence, as a last resort. For Guru Gobind Singh said in a Persian couplet in his Zafarnamah:

When all other means have failed,
It is but lawful to take to the sword.

During his stay at Paonta, Guru Gobind Singh availed himself of his spare time to practise different forms of manly exercises, such as riding, swimming and archery. His increasing influence among the people and the martial exercises of his men excited the jealousy of the neighbouring Rajpat hill rulers who led by Raja Fateh Chand of Garhval collected a host to attack him. But they were worsted in an action at Bhangam, about 10 km northeast of Paonta, on 18 Assu 1745 sk/18 September 1688. Soon there after Guru Gobind Singh left Paonta



and returned to Anandpur which he fortified in view of the continuing hostility of the Rajput chiefs as well as of the repressive policy of the imperial government at Delhi.

The Guru and his Sikhs were involved in a battle with a Mughal commander, Alif Khan, at Nadaun on the left bank of the Beas,

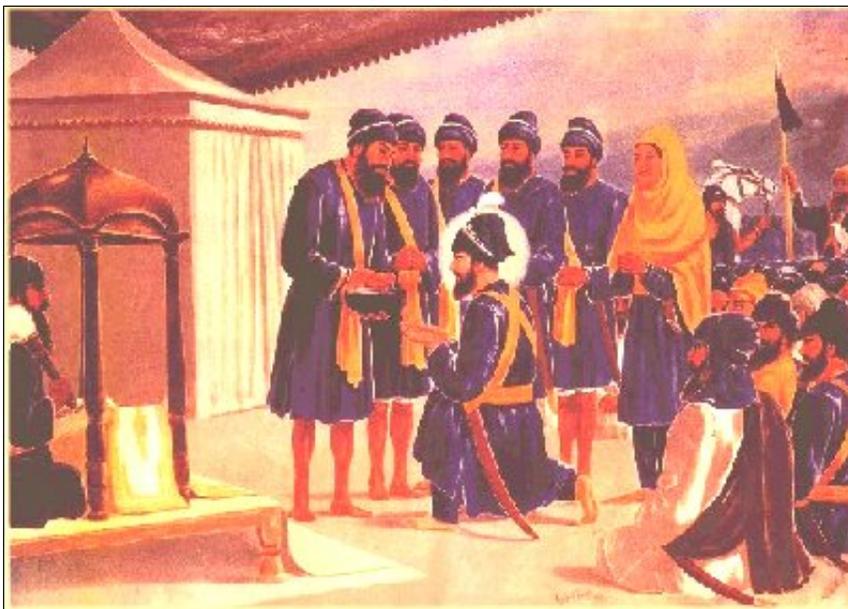
about 30 km southeast of Kangra, on 22 Chet 1747 Bk/20 March 1691.

Describing the battle in stirring verse in Bachitra Natak, he said that Alif Khan fled in utter disarray "without being able to give any attention to his camp."

Among several other skirmishes that occurred was the Husaim battle (20 February 1696) fought against Husain Khan, an imperial general, which resulted in a decisive victory for the Sikhs. Following the appointment in 1694 of the liberal Prince Muazzam (later Emperor Bahadur Shah) as viceroy of northwestern region including Punjab, there was however a brief respite from pressure from the ruling authority.

In 1698, Guru Gobind Singh issued directions to Sikh sangats or communities in different parts not to acknowledge masands, the local ministers, against whom he had heard complaints. Sikhs, he instructed, should come to Anandpur straight without any intermediaries and bring their offerings personally. The Guru thus established direct relationship with his Sikhs and addressed them as his Khalsa, Persian term used for crown-lands as distinguished from feudal chiefs. The institution of the Khalsa was given concrete form on 30 March 1699 when Sikhs had gathered at Anandpur in large numbers for the annual festival of Baisakhi. Gurb Gobind Singh appeared before the assembly dramatically on that day with a naked sword in hand and, to quote Kuir Singh, Gurbilas Patshahz 10, spoke: "Is there present a true Sikh who would offer his head to the Guru as a

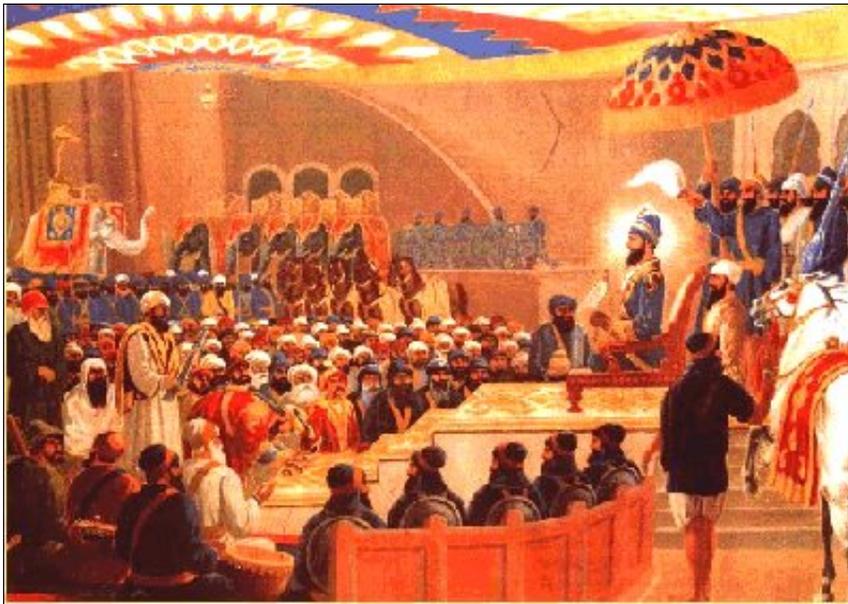
sacrifice?" The words numbed the audience who looked on in awed silence. The Gurb repeated the call. At the third call Daya Ram, a Sobti Khatri of Lahore, arose and humbly walked behind the Guru to a tent near by. The Gurb returned with his sword dripping blood, and asked for another head. At this Dharam Das, a Jat from Hastinapur, came forward and was taken inside the enclosure. Guru Gobind Singh made three more calls. Muhkam Chand, a washerman from Dvarka, Himmat, a water-carrier from Jagannath puri, and Sahib Chand, a barber from Bidar (Karnataka) responded one after another and advanced to offer their heads. All the five were led back from the tent dressed alike in saffron-coloured raiment topped over with neatly tied turbans similarly dyed, with swords dangling by their sides. Guru Gobind Singh then introduced *khande da pahul*, i.e. initiation by sweetened water churned with a double-edged broad sword (khanda). Those five Sikhs were the first to be initiated. Guru Gobind Singh called them Panj Piare, the five devoted spirits beloved of the Guru. These five, three of them from the so-called low-castes, a Ksatriya and a Jatt, formed the nucleus of the self-abnegating, martial and casteless fellowship of the Khalsa. All



of them surnamed Singh, meaning lion, were required to wear in future the five symbols of the Khalsa, all beginning with the letter K the kes or long hair and beard, kangha, a comb in the kes to keep it tidy as against the recluses who kept it matted in

token of their having renounced the world, Kara, a steel bracelet, kachch, short breeches, and kirpan, a sword. They were enjoined to succour the helpless and fight the oppressor, to have faith in one God and to consider all human beings equal, irrespective of caste and creed. Guru Gobind Singh then himself received initiatory rites from five disciples, now invested with authority as Khalsa, and had his name changed from Gobind Rai to Gobind Singh. "Hail," as the poet subsequently sang, "Gobind Singh who is himself Master as well as disciple." Further injunctions were laid down for the Sikhs. They must never cut or trim

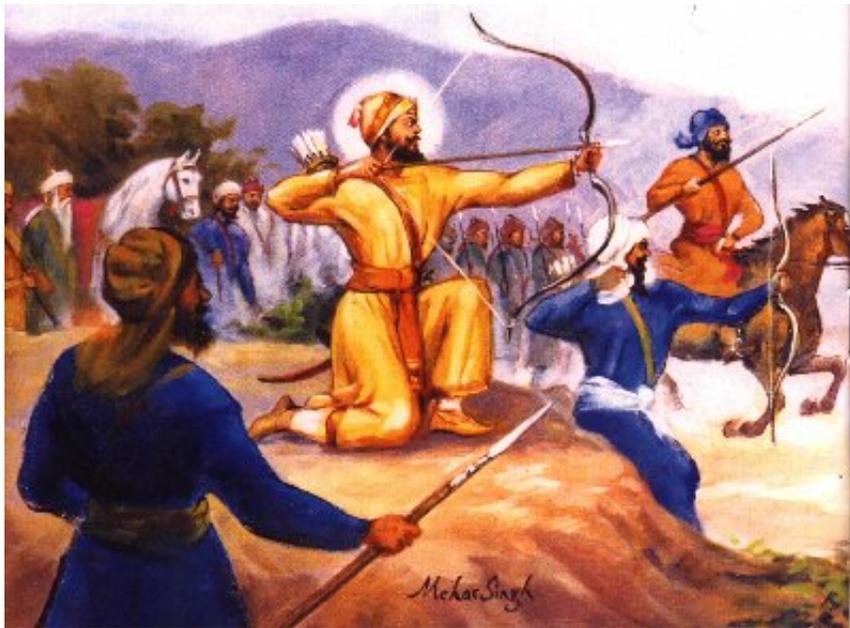
their hair and beards, nor smoke tobacco. A Sikh must not have sexual relationship outside the marital bond, nor eat the flesh of an animal killed slowly in the Muslim way (or in any sacrificial ceremony).



These developments alarmed the caste-ridden Rajput chiefs of the Sivalik hills. They rallied under the leadership of the Raja of Bilaspur, in whose territory lay Anandpur, to forcibly evict Guru Gobind Singh from his hilly

citadel. Their repeated expeditions during 1700-04 however proved abortive. They at last petitioned Emperor Aurangzeb for help. In concert with contingents sent under imperial orders by the governor of Lahore and those of the faujdar of Sirhind, they marched upon Anandpur and laid a siege to the fort in Jeth 1762 sk/May 1705. Over the months, the Guru and his Sikhs firmly withstood their successive assaults despite dire scarcity of food resulting from the prolonged blockade. While the besieged were reduced to desperate straits, the besiegers too were chagrined at the tenacity with which the Sikhs held out. At this stage the besiegers offered, on solemn oaths of Quran, safe exit to the Sikhs if they quit Anandpur. At last, the town was evacuated during the night of Poh suds 1, 1762 sk/5-6 December 1705. But soon, as the Guru and his Sikhs came out, the hill monarchs and their Mughal allies set upon them in full fury. In the ensuing confusion many Sikhs were killed and all of the Guru's baggage, including most of the precious manuscripts, was lost. The Guru himself was able to make his way to Chamkaur, 40 km southwest of Anandpur, with barely 40 Sikhs and his two elder sons. There the imperial army, following closely on his heels, caught up with him. His two sons, Ajit Singh (b. 1687) and Jujhar Singh (b. 1691) and all but five of the Sikhs fell in the action that took place on 7 December 1705. The five surviving Sikhs bade the Guru to save himself in order to reconsolidate the Khalsa. Guru Gobind Singh with three of his Sikhs escaped into the wilderness of the Malva, two of his Muslim devotees, Gani Khan and Nabi Khan, helping

him at great personal risk.



Guru Gobind Singh's two younger sons, Zorawar Singh (b. 1696) and Fateh Singh (b.1699), and his mother, Mata Gujari, were after the [evacuation of Anandpur](#) betrayed by their old servant and escort, Gangu, to the faujdar of Sirhind, who had the young children executed on 13 December 1705. Their grandmother died the same day. Befriended by another Muslim admirer, Ral Kalha of Raikot, [Guru Gobind Singh reached Dina in the heart of the Malva](#). [There he enlisted a few hundred warriors of the Brar clan](#), and also composed his famous letter, Zafarnamah or the Epistle of Victory, in Persian verse, addressed to Emperor Aurangzeb. The letter was a severe indictment of the Emperor and his commanders who had perjured their oath and treacherously attacked him once he was outside the safety of his fortification at Anandpur. It emphatically reiterated the sovereignty of morality in the affairs of State as much as in the conduct of human beings and held the means as important as the end. Two of the Sikhs, Daya Singh and Dharam Singh, were despatched with the Zafarnamah to Ahmadnagar in the South to deliver it to Aurangzeb, then in camp in that town.

From Dina, Guru Gobind Singh continued his westward march until, finding the host close upon his heels, he took position astride the water pool of Khidrana to make a last-ditch stand. The fighting on 29 December 1705 was hard and desperate. In spite of their overwhelming numbers, the Mughal troops failed to capture the Guru and had to retire in defeat. The most valorous part in this battle

was played by a group of 40 Sikhs who had deserted the Guru at Anandpur during the long siege, but who, chided by their womenfolk at home, had come back under the leadership of a brave and devoted woman, Mai Bhago, to redeem themselves. They had fallen fighting desperately to check the enemy's advance towards the Guru's position. The Guru blessed the 40 dead as 40 mukte, i.e. the 40 Saved Ones. The site is now marked by a sacred shrine and tank and the town which has grown around them is called Muktsar, the Pool of liberations.

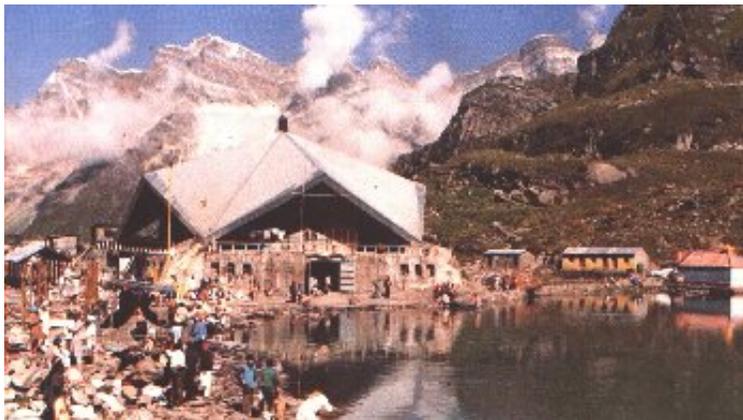
After spending some time in the Lakkhi Jungle country, Guru Gobind Singh arrived at Talvandi Sabo, now called Damdama Sahib, on 20 January 1706. During his stay there of over nine months, a number of Sikhs rejoined him. He prepared a fresh recension of Sikh Scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, with the celebrated scholar, Bhai Mani Singh, as his amanuensis. From the number of scholars who had rallied round Guru Gobind Singh and from the literary activity initiated, the place came to be known as the Guru's Kashi or seat of learning like Varanasi.

The epistle Zafarnamah sent by Guru Gobind Singh from Dina seems to have touched the heart of Emperor Aurungzeb. He forthwith invited him for a meeting. According to Ahkam-i-Alamgiri, the Emperor had a letter written to the deputy governor of Lahore, Munim Khan, to conciliate the Guru and make the required arrangements for his journey to the Deccan. Guru Gobind Singh had, however, already left for the South on 30 October 1706. He was in the neighbourhood of Baghor, in Rajasthan, when the news arrived of the death of the Emperor at Ahmadnagar on 20 February 1707. The Guru there upon decided to return to the Punjab, via Shahjahanabad (Delhi) . That was the time when the sons of the deceased Emperor were preparing to contest succession. Guru Gobind Singh despatched for the help of the eldest claimant, the liberal Prince Muazzam, a token contingent of Sikhs which took part in the battle of Jajau (8 June 1707), decisively won by the Prince who ascended the throne with the title of Bahadur Shah. The new Emperor invited Guru Gobind Singh for a meeting which took place at Agra on 23 July 1707.

Emperor Bahadur Shah had at this time to move against the Kachhvaha Rajputs of Amber (Jaipur) and then to the Deccan where his youngest brother,

Kam Baksh, had raised the standard of revolt. The Guru accompanied him and, as says Tarzkh-i-Bahadur Shahi, he addressed assemblies of people on the way preaching the word of Guru Nanak. The two camps crossed the River Tapti between 11 and 14 June 1708 and the Ban-Ganga on 14 August, arriving at Nanded, on the Godavari, towards the end of August. While Bahadur Shah proceeded further South, Guru Gobind Singh decided to stay awhile at Nanded. Here he met a Bairagi recluse, [Madho Das, whom he converted a Sikh administering to him the vows of the Khalsa](#), renaming him Gurbakhsh Singh (popular name Banda Singh). Guru Gobind Singh gave Banda Singh five arrows from his own quiver and an escort, including five of his chosen Sikhs, and directed him to go to the Punjab and carry on the campaign against the tyranny of the provincial overlords.

Nawab Wazir Khan of Sirhind had felt concerned at the Emperor's conciliatory treatment of Guru Gobind Singh. Their marching together to the South made him jealous, and he charged two of his trusted men with murdering the Guru before his increasing friendship with the Emperor resulted in any harm to him. These two pathans Jamshed Khan and Wasil Beg are the names given in the Guru Kian Sakhian pursued the Guru secretly and overtook him at Nanded, where, according to Sri Gur Sobha by Senapati, a contemporary writer, one of them



stabbed the Guru in the left side below the heart as he lay one evening in his chamber resting after the Rahrasi prayer. Before he could deal another blow, Guru Gobind Singh struck him down with his sabre, while his fleeing

companion fell under the swords of Sikhs who had rushed in on hearing the noise. As the news reached Bahadur Shah's camp, he sent expert surgeons, including an Englishman, Cole by name, to attend on the Guru. The wound was stitched and appeared to have healed quickly but, as the Guru one day applied strength to pull a stiff bow, it broke out again and bled profusely. This weakened the Guru beyond cure and he passed away on Kattak sudi 5, 1765 Bk/7 October 1708. Before the end came, Guru Gobind Singh had asked for the Sacred Volume to be brought forth. To quote Bhatt Vahi Talauda Parganah Jind: "Guru

Gobind Singh, the Tenth Master, son of Guru Teg Bahadur, grandson of Guru Hargobind, great-grandson of Guru Arjan, of the family of Guru Ram Das Surajbansi, Gosal clan, Sodhi Khatri, resident of Anandpur, parganah Kahlur, now at Nanded, in the Godavari country in the Deccan, asked Bhai Daya Singh, on Wednesday, 7 October 1708, to fetch Sri Granth Sahib. In obedience to his orders, Daya Singh brought Sri Granth Sahib. The Guru placed before it five pice and a coconut and bowed his head before it. He said to the sangat, "It is my commandment: Own Sri Granthji in my place. He who so acknowledges it will obtain his reward. The Guru will rescue him. Know this as the truth".

Guru Gobind Singh thus passed on the succession with due ceremony to the Holy Book, the Guru Granth Sahib, ending the line of personal Gurus. "The Guru's spirit," he said, "will henceforth be in the Granth and the Khalsa. Where the Granth is with any five Sikhs representing the Khalsa, there will the Guru be." The Word enshrined in the Holy Book was always revered by the Gurus as well as by their disciples as of Divine origin. The Guru was the revealer of the Word. One day the Word was to take the place of the Guru. The inevitable came to pass when Guru Gobind Singh declared the Guru Granth Sahib as his successor. It was only through the Word that the Guruship could be made everlasting. The Word as contained in the Guru Granth Sahib was henceforth, and for all time to come to be the Guru for the Sikhs.

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