

Books

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Gurū Hargobind (1595-1644)

Gurū Hargobind was sixth in the spiritual descent from Gurū Nānak. He was born the only son of Gurū Arjan and Mātā Gaṅgā (ਮਾਤਾ ਗੰਗਾ) on 19 June 1595 at Vaḍālī (ਵਡਾਲੀ), now called Vadālī Gurū, a village near Amritsar. As a child, he escaped being poisoned by a jealous uncle and being bitten by a cobra thrown in his way. He also survived a virulent attack of smallpox and grew to be a tall and handsome youth. His contribution to the Sikh faith can be summed up in one phrase, i.e., making them Saints-Soldiers.

He received his early education and training at the hands of two revered Sikhs of that time Bhāī Gurdās and Bābā Buḍhā. The former taught him the religious texts and the latter the arts of swordsmanship and archery. He was barely 11 years of age when his father, Gurū Arjan, was martyred in Lahaur (ਲਾਹੌਰ). Gurū Arjan nominated him his successor and, according to the Sṛī Gur Pratāp Sūraj Granth (ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਤਾਪ ਸੂਰਜ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ), sent him instruction "to ascend the throne fully armed, and have armed men, as many as you can, to accompany you." For the ceremonies of succession Gurū Hargobind chose himself a warrior's equipment. He sat on a seat he had erected in front of the Harimandar, with two swords on his person, declaring one to be the symbol of the spiritual and the other that of his temporal investiture. Hukamnāmās were issued to the Sikhs to come with offerings of arms and horses. Gurū Hargobind maintained a retinue of 52 armed Sikhs. Many more came to offer him their services, and several of them were provided with horses and weapons. Sports became popular and bards were engaged to recite heroic poetry.

Gurū Hargobind combined a soldierly demeanour with a compassionate disposition and carried out his spiritual office in keeping with the custom of his predecessors. "He," as says the Mahimā Prakāsh, "arose three hours before daybreak and sat in seclusion, to concentrate on the Divine. Then he dressed himself and joined the presence of the Holy Granth and began to recite it silently. None entered to interrupt him. None could fathom the depth of his spiritual absorption. "

Reports about the splendid style of Gurū Hargobind led Emperor Jahāṅgīr (ਜਹਾਂਗੀਰ) to pass orders for his detention in the Fort of Gwalior. According to the Dabistān-e-Mazāhib (ਦਬਿਸਤਾਨ-ਏ-ਮਜ਼ਹਿਬ), the charge levelled against him was that he had not paid the fine imposed on his father. For how long he remained in the Fort cannot be stated with certainty. From forty days to twelve years, in Dabistān-e-Mazāhib, several different periods of time are mentioned. It seems that Gurū Hargobind remained in the Fort for a few months during 1617-19 whereafter he was required to stay in the royal camp under surveillance for some time. During his detention in Gvāliar (ਗਵਾਲਿਅਰ), Sikhs made trips to the city in batches to see him and, when barred from entering the Fort, they proffered obeisance from outside its walls and returned. As time came for Gurū Hargobind to be released from the Fort, he came out on the condition that all other detainees were freed, too. He led 52 prisoners out of the Fort. Bandī Chor (ਬੰਦੀ ਛੋੜ / Liberator Benign) is the title by which he is remembered to this day. When at last Gurū Hargobind reached Amritsar, Sikhs illuminated the town. The anniversary of the event is still celebrated at Harimandar Sahib with Lights and fireworks.

Emperor Jahāṅgīr from now on continued to be conciliatory and, according to Sikh tradition, he delivered Gurū Hargobind to Candū Shāh (ਚੰਦੂ ਸ਼ਾਹ), who took part of the responsibility for the execution of Gurū Arjan and for his own incarceration. Candū Shāh met with a violent end at the hands of the Sikhs. On his lands, also made over to him, Gurū Hargobind founded a new town which came to be known as Srī Hargobindpur. As the work commenced, Bhagvān Dās (ਭਗਵਾਨ ਦਾਸ), a local landlord, objected and attacked the Sikhs with a party of his men. Bhagvān Dās was killed in the skirmish. His son, Ratan Cand (ਰਤਨ ਚੰਦ), and Candū Shāh's son, Karam Cand (ਕਰਮ ਚੰਦ), sought help from the Mughal faujdār (ਫੌਜਦਾਰ) of Jalandhar (ਜਲੰਧਰ) who sent a body of troops against Gurū Hargobind. They were repulsed in the battle that ensued. Both these actions were fought in the vicinity of Ruhelā (ਰੁਹੇਲਾ). At Srī Hargobindpur, the Gurū built along with the dharamsālā (ਧਰਮਸਾਲਾ) a mosque for the Muslims.

In 1628 the city of Amritsar witnessed the first onslaught by the Mughals. Shāh Jāhām (ਸ਼ਾਹ ਜਹਾਂ), who succeeded his father in 1627, knew that the Sikh tradition had undergone a metamorphosis under Gurū Hargobind, the only son of the martyred fifth Gurū. He had donned two swords of Mīrī (ਮੀਰੀ / temporal) and Pīrī (ਪੀਰੀ / spiritual), had raised an Akāl Takht (1609), built Lohgarh (ਲੋਹਗੜ੍ਹ / fortress), collected arms, recruited three Paṭhān (ਪਠਾਨ) mercenaries under Paimde Khān (ਪੈਂਦੇ ਖਾਨ) and was giving military training to his followers. On pretext of getting a royal hawk released from the Gurū, an expedition of 7,000 strong under Ghhulām Rasūl Khān Pañj Hazārī (ਗੁਲਾਮ ਰਸੂਲ ਖਾਨ ਪੰਜ ਹਜ਼ਾਰੀ) and Mukhlis Khān (ਮੁਖਲਿਸ ਖਾਨ), Deputy Nazīm (ਨਜ਼ੀਮ), was sent.

The combat with royal forces took place at Gumtālā (ਗੁਮਤਾਲਾ), then a suburb of Amritsar. The feats of valor displayed by Bidhīā (ਬਿਧੀਆ), Jethā (ਜੇਠਾ), and Pirāgā (ਪਿਰਾਗਾ) each at the head of 100 villagers from Kambovāl (ਕੰਬੋਵਾਲ), who at the moment had arrived to pay homage to the Sixth Gurū. The royal troops suffered heavy casualties, including those of Mukhlis Khān

the commander of the Mughal army, Maulā Bakhsh (ਮੌਲਾ ਬਖਸ਼), son of Qutab-ud-Dīn (ਕੁਤਬ-ਉਦ-ਦੀਨ), a Qāzī (ਕਾਜ਼ੀ) of Lahaur and Zaffar Beg, a commander. Ghulām Rasūl Khān fled. Thirteen Sikhs were killed on the Gurū's side. They died in the defence of the city, the temple and the Gurū.

Soon afterwards Gurū Hargobind left Amritsar, this time taking with him the holy Granth Sāhib seated in the Harimandar. The first long halt was at Darauh (ਦਰੌਹ), near Mogā, in present-day Fāridkot district. From there Gurū Hargobind sent the Gurū Granth Sahib with the family to Kārtārpur. He himself sojourned in the Mālvā, visiting his Sikhs and confronting, on 16 December 1634, the Mughal troops in yet another battle, this time at Lahirā, near Mahrāj, now in Baṭhindā district. Another armed clash took place at Kārtārpur, when Gurū Hargobind's own erstwhile Paṭhān follower, Paimde Khān, led out a Mughal force against him. According to Tejā Singh and Gaṇḍā Singh Gurū Hargobind had won four battles, but his purpose had always been only defensive.

Gurū Hargobind finally retired to Kīrātpur where he spent the remaining nine years of his life in peace. Kīrātpur now became the centre of the Sikh faith. Sikhs came here from all parts to see the Gurū. Gurū Hargobind gave most of his time to religious devotions. Contact was maintained with saṅgats in farflung places, and old warriors like Bidhī Cand were sent out as preachers. For Sikhs the roles of saint and soldier had become mutually complementary. About the Gurū himself, Bhāī Gurdās wrote: "The great hero is Gurū Hargobind. He is the vanquisher of armies, but his heart is full of love and charity." This synthesis of the heroic and the spiritual was Gurū Hargobind's distinctive contribution to the evolution of Sikh society.

Gurū Hargobind had travelled extensively in the Pañjāb spreading the word of Gurū Nanak. He had also visited places such as Nānakmatā and Srīnagar in Gaṛhvāl in the east and Kashmīr in the north. The journey to Kashmīr was made in 1620 in the company of Emperor Jahāngīr, and Srīnagar, Bārāmūlā, Uṛī and Pūmch (ਪੂੰਛ) were among the places visited. Gurduārās in these and in many places in the Pañjāb and outside honour the memory of Gurū Hargobind.

Gurū Hargobind, like all of his predecessors, lived a married life. He had six children — five sons and a daughter. Gurdittā (ਗੁਰਦਿੱਤਾ), Anat Rāī (ਅਨਤ ਰਾਇ), Vīro (ਵੀਰੋ), Sūraj Mal (ਸੂਰਜ ਮਲ), Aṭal Rāī (ਅਟਲ ਰਾਇ) and Teghbahādur (ਤੇਗਬਹਾਦੁਰ). Two of his sons, Bābā Gurdittā and Aṭal Rāī, died in his lifetime. Gurū Hargobind passed away on 3 March 1644 at Kīratpur.