

Guru Arjan Dev

His Life and Teachings



THE LIFE & TEACHINGS OF

**GURU
ARJAN DEV**

AMRITA SHARMA

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*To my special sister, Vishakha
may happiness and gladness be yours...
because you are all the wonderful
things that make up a wonderful sister.*

BIRTH

Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth descendant of Guru Nanak, was born on April 15, 1563. He was the youngest son of Bhai Jetha (later Guru Ram Das) and Bibi Bhani. There was great rejoicing everywhere in all the Sikh *sangats* at his birth. This unusual rejoicing surprised quite a few people, since this was not the first time a son had been born in the family. The newborn was the third son of the Guru's daughter. Although his two sons, Mohan and Mohri, had also been married but not much notice was taken when they had their children. Guru Amardas, however, was very pleased about this new child in the house. There were widespread celebrations, and food and clothes were distributed among the poor and needy. Everyone came to bless the child, who, from the very beginning, had a serene and divine look on his face.

Guru Amardas was extremely fond of his grandson, Arjan, and loved to play with him.

The child Arjan was also very fond of his grandfather and was always hovering around him. One day, when Guru Amardas was having his afternoon nap, the child Arjan trotted into the room and woke him up. When the attendant saw this he was really scared, since it was strictly understood that no one was to disturb the Guru during his afternoon nap. The Guru always woke up very early in the morning for his daily prayers and meditation. When the nervous attendant picked up the child from the Guru's chamber, the Guru stopped him and said that this grandson of his would one day cruise people across the ocean of life.

On yet another occasion, it so happened that when Guru Amardas was eating, Arjan Dev crawled into the room and tried to share his meal. The Sikh attending the Guru carried the baby away, but he reappeared after a little while. He was again forbidden by the Sikh and removed from the Guru's chamber. When the baby persisted in entering the room the third time, the Guru handed him the tray and said that he had to inherit this tray someday, so the child might as well do it then. The Sikhs attending the Guru heard this and picked up the child in



reverence. They realised through Guru Amardas's words that baby Arjan would grow up to become their Guru one day.

Arjan Dev grew up to be a very kind, generous and warm person. Everyone loved him. He was of a very altruistic and religious nature. He studied the religious scriptures devotedly and said his prayers daily. He was also very compassionate by nature. He was moved at the plight of the weak and the oppressed. He could not tolerate injustice or oppression of any sort. He did all that was in his power to help the poor and the needy, without any selfish motive. He never thought of being rewarded for his actions. When Guru Ram Das saw his noble nature, his religious bent of mind and the infinite compassion he had for his fellow human beings, he was convinced that Arjan Dev was the rightful successor to the holy seat of the Guru.

However, Prithi Chand, Arjan Dev's elder brother, was another strong claimant to the Guru's seat. Though in his heart Guru Ram Das was convinced of Arjan Dev being worthy of the holy seat, he still decided to test him before openly declaring him the Guru.

Before long, he found the opportunity to do so. It so happened that one of Guru Ram Das's

cousins, Sahari Mal, came to invite the Guru to Lahore on the marriage of his son. The Guru was much too pre-occupied with the construction of the holy tank. It was an assignment given to him by Guru Amardas and he wished to complete it in his lifetime. He, therefore, called his eldest son, Prithi Chand, and asked him to go to Lahore with Sahari Mal, on his behalf. Prithi Chand however, feared that his father was trying to get him out of the way so that he could install his youngest brother, Arjan, as Guru. He knew what a favourite Arjan was with his father and so he refused to go. The Guru then called his second son, Mahadev. He too refused to go, on some pretext.

And so, when Arjan Dev was just twelve years old, Guru Ram Das ordered him to go and attend the wedding of his uncle's son on his behalf. He also told Arjan Dev specifically to wait there till he received further instructions from the Guru. Arjan Dev attended the wedding as ordered, and waited to hear from his father. But he received no further instructions from his Guru to come back to Goindwal.

As time passed, Arjan Dev became more and more restless to meet his Guru. He was

unhappy on being separated from him and being deprived of the opportunity to serve him. But he could do nothing about it since the Guru's orders meant more to him than his own life. And so he continued to stay and wait as instructed. He utilised this time for spreading the golden words of the Sikh Gurus. Everyday, he used to recite the *Gurbani* amidst the assembly of people gathered there, and give them the Guru's sermons. For him, the only silver lining in this dark cloud of separation was that he was discharging his duty there as best as he could. Two long years passed thus and Arjan Dev kept waiting.

At last, Arjan Dev decided to send word to his father himself asking his permission to return. He composed a poem for the purpose, and sent it to the Guru through a servant. When the messenger reached his destination, the Guru happened to be resting. Prithi Chand, however, recognised the servant from Lahore and inquired what had brought him there. When the messenger told him that he was to deliver a letter to the Guru, Prithi Chand took it and assured him that he would pass it on to him. Having done his work the servant returned. Prithi Chand knew that the

moment his father saw the letter, he would send for Arjan Dev. So he decided to withhold it. He then sent word to Arjan on behalf of his father that he should continue to stay at Lahore a little longer.

Several months passed and still there was no news. Arjan Dev was now desperate. He could not wait to be near his father and his Guru. So he composed another poem and sent it once more to his father. Prithi Chand knew that Arjan would be sending another message soon, so he was on the lookout for any messenger from Lahore. He succeeded in intercepting the second letter too. He again sent a message that Arjan should continue to stay at Lahore, and that the Guru would himself come to Lahore shortly, and get him back.

Arjan Dev, therefore, waited faithfully for several more months for the Guru's promised visit to Lahore, but there was no news about it. He then composed yet another poem with a desperate tone, and this time he made sure that it was delivered to his father personally. He had also marked the letter so that the Guru would know that it was his third letter. Accordingly, when Guru Ram Das read it, he asked the messenger about the other two

letters, who replied that he had given it to Prithi Chand. When he was summoned by an angry Guru, Prithi Chand denied having any knowledge of the letters. At this, Guru Ram Das asked an attendant to search his room for the letters which were duly found in his garment. Prithi Chand was then humiliated for his treachery and he began to despise Arjan Dev even more. The Guru then sent Bhai Budha and asked him to bring Arjan back home with all honours. Meanwhile, Arjan Dev had almost lost hope of ever being able to serve his beloved father and Guru again.

Then one day, Bhai Budha arrived from Goindwal and came to Arjan Dev with the Guru's instructions. Arjan Dev was ecstatic at the glad tidings from his Guru. When Bhai Buddha told him that Guruji wanted to see him and so he had come to take him back, the words were like music to his ears. He thanked God for making his Guru remember him, finally. He told an amused Bhai Budha, how painful his wait had been and how he wanted to fly away to have his Guru's *darshan*. But he had not, since he was bound by the Guru's orders. Bhai Budha then escorted Arjan Dev back to his Guru in Goindwal.

When he reached there, he fell at his father's feet and wept bitterly for a very long time. When the Guru saw Arjan Dev full of affection for him despite the torturous wait, the Guru also thawed with emotion. Guru Ram Das then declared Arjan Devji as the next Guru and entrusting the seat to him in the year 1581, left for his eternal home.

THE NEW GURU

When Prithi Chand, Guru Arjan Dev's elder brother, came to know of it, he refused to accept him as the new Guru. When Guru Arjan Dev was presented the turban of the Guru by Guru Amardas's son, Mohri, Prithi Chand objected vehemently. He claimed that as the eldest son of Guru Ram Das, he was the occupant of the seat and that the turban should have been offered to him instead of Arjan Devji. When the new Guru heard of it, he immediately went up to his elder brother and presented him the turban. Not only that, he even left Goindwal for his new township to avoid any further confrontation with his brother. For him, the seat was not important at all, it was the continuation of his father and Guru's work that really mattered to him.

But Prithi Chand was not reconciled at all. He knew that even if Guru Arjan Devji resigned the seat to him, the whole Sikh *sangat* would never accept him. They would



still consider Arjan Devji as their Guru. So he started thinking of ways and means to get Arjan Devji out of his way. Guru Arjan Dev, however, did not give even a single thought to Prithi Chand. He was very engrossed in his own work as a Guru.

In 1579, Guru Arjan Dev got married to Gangadevi, daughter of Shri Krishna Chandra who was the inhabitant of village Man in Jullandhar district. After this, Guru Arjan devoted himself wholeheartedly to religious and altruistic deeds. Under Guru Arjan, the Sikhs became a distinct community and the secular nature of the community was revealed. Soon it began to take shape as a sect, different from others. The teachings of the first four Gurus began to show results. The community developed a new religious outlook, customs, habits and ways of worshipping God. Guru Arjan Dev taught them to worship only one God — the Immortal One, all powerful and all pervading. One of the most progressive changes was that the rigid caste system showed signs of extinction. The distinction between high and low was fast disappearing and a new society was taking shape. Guru Arjan told everyone that Guru Nanak had himself rejected the caste

system of the Hindus by saying that there is no higher caste or lower caste. It's one's deeds that determine whether one is good or bad, high or low. Guru Arjan did everything he could do to abolish this difference. He preached that one must work and earn, and share one's earnings with others.

Guru Arjan's own humility was unparalleled, and he tried to cultivate this virtue even in his disciples. There was no trace of self in him. He emphasized with actions that more important than the Guru were the Guru's Sikhs. In him, was the culmination of all that Guru Nanak stood for. He combined in his teachings the best of Hinduism and Islam. Rather than alienating anyone, he preferred a mutual understanding. He was venerated equally by the Muslims and the Hindus since they knew that he was peace-loving, devoted to meditation and prayers, and to the service of men. Sikhism under Guru Arjan dispensed with all rites and rituals and worship of idols. It comprised solely of love of God and service of humanity.

Under the Guru's preaching and guidance, people from various castes, professions and religions came into the fold of the Sikhism.

The gospel of Guru Nanak and the spirit of Sikh religion was now evident in all walks of life.

Many affluent and influential people entered Sikhism. They placed their wealth at the Guru's feet and with its help the Sikh movement, under Guru Arjan Dev, became widespread and popular. The Guru utilised the generously donated wealth for the welfare and upliftment of his people. At Amritsar, he busied himself with completing the holy tanks of Santokhsar and Amritsar. Though Guru Arjan was a man of letters and a poet of eminence, he was highly organized and practical. Since he undertook various massive construction works, he set up brick kilns to bake bricks. With a view to making Amritsar a self-sufficient town, he invited skilled workers of all crafts to settle there. Traders from Kashmir and Kabul were encouraged so that Amritsar became an important commercial centre in Punjab. He also finished all the work that was left incomplete by his father, Guru Ram Das.

When the Guru was working at the Santokhsar tank an amazing incident took place. When the excavations were being done there, the digger happened to come upon a

tiny hut in which they saw a yogi squatting in deep meditation. He was immediately taken out of there and given a massage. When he regained consciousness and saw Guru Arjan Dev, he was ecstatic. Falling at his feet, he revealed that ages ago he had been blessed by his Guru who had said that he would meet Guru Arjan Dev in *kaliyug* and attain deliverance at his hands. Ever since then, he had been in meditation waiting for the day when he would behold Guru Arjan Dev.

In 1858, Santokhsar was completed. After this, Guru Arjan Dev devoted his attention to the completion of Amritsar — the tank of nectar. He got the foundation stone of Hari Mandir (the Golden Temple) laid by the famous and revered Muslim, Saint Mian Mir. Guru Arjan Dev ordained that this temple was to be open to everyone, irrespective of caste, creed, sex and religion, and that people could go in and worship as they pleased. When his followers entreated that the temple be the largest building in town, Guru Arjan Dev told them that their temple was to be the symbol of the virtue and of humility, and so it would be constructed on as low an elevation as possible. With the resources and single-minded dedication of the Sikhs, the



construction of the holy tank and temple made rapid progress. With its completion Guru Arjan Dev gave the credit for it to Guru Ram Das and said that whoever took a dip in this holy tank of Ram Das would be cleansed of all sins.

FIGHTING THE ODDS

Prithi Chand continued to pester the Guru to stop his religious and social activities. He tried to harm the Guru in whatever way he could. He became violently hostile and filled the path of the Guru with thorns. Guru Arjan was fortunate in having the loyal support of Bhai Budha and Bhai Gurdas in thwarting the evil designs of Prithi Chand and preventing a rift in the community. On their advice, Guru Arjan Dev decided to leave Amritsar and go out on an extensive tour to meet his loyal disciples in various towns of Punjab. He visited Khadwi, Goindwal, Sarhali, Bhaini, Khanpur, Taran Taran, Lahore, Dera Baba Nanak and several other places. During his tour he also laid the foundation stone of Kartarpur, which was a new township near Jullandhar. He also got a well called Ganga Sagar dug in the town.

One day, a man called Baisakhi came to meet the Guru. He was on his way to

Hardwar, where he went regularly every year without fail. The Guru told him that he could take a dip in the waters of the well which had recently been dug by him in that town. He also said that water everywhere came from the same source, but Baisakhi would not hear of it. He did not want to miss going to the holy city of Hardwar where he had been going annually for many years now. The Guru let him go. When he returned after a few months, he complained that he had lost a vessel in the Holy Ganges. As a result he could not bring the holy water for the Guru. Hearing this, the Guru walked up to the new well and from there he pulled out Baisakhi's vessel which had slipped from his hands at the holy river. Baisakhi was speechless when he saw his vessel, which even had his name etched on it. He immediately fell at Guruji's feet and asked his forgiveness.

A lot of people used to come to the Guru to confess their sins and repent, or to have their moral dilemmas resolved, and no one went away disappointed or dissatisfied. One day, a soldier came to the Guru for spiritual advice. He was serving a cruel king who had no qualms about killing, and who was always engaged in war. The soldier had grown a



strong aversion to fighting and wanted to abscond. He was facing a moral dilemma and wanted peace of mind. The Guru told him that he was a soldier by profession, and as long as he served in the army he must remain loyal to the king and fight his enemies. It was a soldier's *dharma* to live for peace and die fighting. He also told him that he was against renunciation of the world. He said that it was like a soldier running away from the battlefield. One must live in the world and just as a lotus remains above water, he must remain above it. The soldier, after listening to him, went away in a far more peaceful state of mind than he had come. Guru Arjan also believed that one must never quietly bear indignities and atrocities that were inflicted by the cruel rulers. He said that evil must be resisted even if one has to give one's life for it. He also emphasised the virtues of self-sacrifice. According to him, everyone must fight evil and injustice even if it means giving one's life for it.

Guru Arjan was also highly practical when it came to guiding people's day-to-day conduct, morally and spiritually. Once, a village headman called Chuhar came to him for his blessings. He believed that the nature of his duties was such that he had to resort to

falsehood. He was anxious to know how he was going to find his deliverance. The Guru asked him to maintain an account of his good and bad deeds and bring it over to him at the end of the month. When Chuhar came after a month, it was discovered that he had hardly done any good deed, whereas he had a large number of bad deeds to his credit. The Guru asked him to read them out and confess his sins in public. The next month his performance was better. It improved consistently in the following months, until the village headman had only good deeds to his credit and not one bad deed.

Guru Arjan then returned to Amritsar after a few months. Prithi Chand was still intriguing and plotting against the Guru, and was very displeased at his return. Guru Arjan, who did not like this antagonistic attitude of his brother, tried in many ways to appease him but to no avail! Prithi Chand's only consolation was that Guru Arjan had no son. He kept hoping that some day his own son, Meherban, would become the next Guru, even though he himself was deprived of the chance. But here also Prithi Chand was disappointed. Guru Arjan's wife, Gangadevi, was really keen to have a child and so one day, Guru Arjan Dev asked her to go and seek

the blessings of Bhai Budha who was revered by everyone in the Sikh community.

Bibi Gangadevi was surprised to seek the blessings of a Sikh other than the Guru but she did as told. She went with a retinue of attendants and rich gifts and food to meet Bhai Budha. He did not approve of this and so he did not bless her. When a disappointed Gangadevi narrated everything to the Guru he asked her to go again, in all humility, and take only simple food cooked by her hands. The next day, when she went to Bhai Budha, he accepted the food she had taken and blessed her with a son. Then, crushing an onion before her, he predicted that her son would crush the enemies as he had crushed the onion.

When Prithi Chand heard of this, he was furious and swore to get even with the Guru in whatever way he could, no matter how evil the means were. He incited the feudal chief of the Mughals, Sulehi Khan, against Guruji. He instigated the revenue officer to raid Amritsar on the pretext of collecting tax dues. However, it was not long before Guruji got the information of the raid. He did not want bloodshed and war, so he decided to leave the place for sometime and go elsewhere, till conditions improved. Bibi Gangadevi was

expecting her baby anytime now, and so, Guru Arjan Dev left with her and a few men to a nearby village called Badali. He stayed there for two years but received all the information about Amritsar and his disciples from Bhai Budha.

During his stay there, Guru Arjan Dev found that there was a great scarcity of water, and this created a lot of inconvenience to the villagers. To end their distress he got a well dug there with the help of Sikhs. The well was large enough to accommodate six Persian wheels. Since then the place has come to be known as *Chhehrata* — the town of six Persian wheels.

It was in 1595 that Guru Arjan Dev's son, Hargobind, was born. There was great rejoicing in Amritsar at the happy event. And since the child was due to the blessings of Bhai Budha, the Sikhs decided to hold a fair every year in the forest where he lived to commemorate the event. Multitudes of childless women who come to participate in the fair are believed to be blessed with children ever since. When Prithi Chand came to know of the child he and his wife, Karmo, lost their peace of mind. All they could think of was ways to somehow get the child killed.

They first hired a nurse who had her nipples smeared with poison so that she could suckle the child to death. But before she could do that, the poison took its toll on her and she became unconscious. It was only on the intervention of Guru Arjan Dev that she was saved. She then confessed her guilt to him.

Prithi Chand was not deterred by this. He hired a snake charmer to release a poisonous snake in Guru Arjan's courtyard, where his son generally played. But the snake did not harm the child at all.

It had been over two years now since the Guru had left Amritsar. When devotees came from distant places to have Guruji's *darshan*, they did not find him there and so they were really disappointed. The Sikhs of the town gathered together and went to the Guru in a huge group to ask him to come back to the holy city. They asked him to ignore Prithi Chand and return to Amritsar since they felt really lost without him. But the problem with Prithi Chand was still troubling him.

One day, Prithi Chand bribed a servant to poison the milk that Guruji's son took, and the servant did likewise. But the child refused to take the milk, and threw it away. A dog who happened to be nearby licked it and died instantly. Guru Arjan was greatly distressed



at his brother's malicious activities. When Hargobind became a little older, Guru Arjan Dev sent him to Bhai Budha for his studies.

Many miracles are associated with Guru Arjan Dev. It is said that a Sikh called Triloka, who was employed in the army at Kabul, once killed a female deer which by chance was pregnant. He was struck with guilt to see a mother and her unborn baby die before his eyes. He swore that as long as he lived he would never indulge in hunting again. He replaced his sword of steel with a wooden one. When people came to know of it, they were astonished. Some of them even went to the Commander and complained to him about this who then went to Triloka's house for a surprise check of his arms. Seeing no way out of this trouble, he remembered the Guru and prayed for his help in this moment of crisis. To his surprise, when he pulled out the blade from the scabbard it was shining like steel. All those who had come with the intention of maligning Triloka were speechless with shame.

In another such incident, a Sikh from Kabul named Katara found himself in big trouble when someone replaced his weights with faulty ones, and complained to the authorities that he was using wrong weights.

Soon the police raided his shop for inspection. At that very moment some devotee offered some coins to the Guru. Perceiving the problem of his devotee in Kabul, he held the coins for a while on the right-hand palm and then on the left-hand palm. He shifted the coins from one palm to the other again. When his surprised devotees asked him about it, he told them about Katara and the trouble he was in. The next time the Sikh visited Amritsar, he corroborated every word that the Guru had said.

THE CONSPIRACY BEGINS

Before long, Guru Arjan came to hear of something that really troubled him. He learned that his brother, Prithi Chand, was composing his own hymns and passing them off as compositions of Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus. Guru Arjan feared that if this continued, the Sikh religion would be undone and grossly misinterpreted. He decided to take immediate steps to curb this dangerous situation as this threatened the very existence of the Sikh religion. He immediately sent his trusted Sikhs like Bhai Piara and others throughout the country while he personally went to Goindwal, Khadur and Kartarpur to collect the authentic texts of the *Bani* of the Guru preceding him. He was helped by Mohan, Datu and Sri Chand in accomplishing this. He then had a special camp set up by the side of Ramsar tank where he started compiling the *Adi Granth* for the guidanace of his

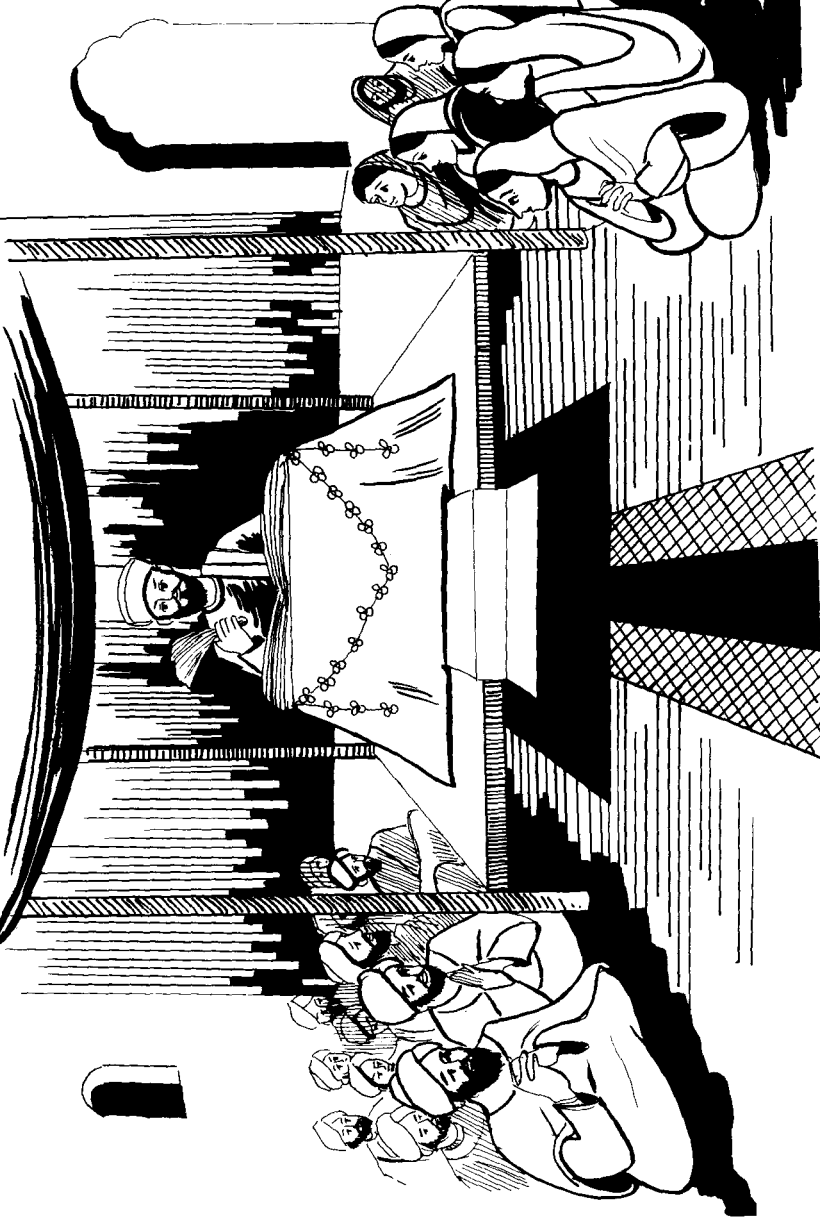
devotees. The *Granth* included the writings of the Gurus, besides a selection of the compositions of the poet-saints from all parts of northern India, both Muslims and Hindus, of all castes and creeds. The hymns were arranged by the Guru under the specific musical measure or 'raga' in which they were originally written by the Gurus, in a chronological order. The compilation of the holy *Granth* was completed in 1604.

However, on the completion of the Hari Mandir the question as to whose idol should be installed in this temple sprang up. Since all Sikh Gurus were the exponents of Lord Almighty's formless existence, they thought that there should be no idol at all. Guru Arjan Dev then called an assembly of holy men consisting of Bhai Budha and his three colleagues and asked their opinion about the installation of the idol. They were of the opinion that no idol was needed since all their Gurus had openly and unanimously declared that God is infinite, formless and without any beginning or end. As God was omniscient, they considered it sacrilegious to limit the infinite form and install his idol.

After hearing their opinion Guru Arjan Dev suggested that they could install their *Pothi Saheb* in place of an idol, which he

believed would inspire people constantly to lead an ideal and pure life. He saw it as the best means to direct people on the path of righteousness. The suggestion was approved and applauded by everyone including Bhai Budha, and so in the year 1604 the *Pothi Saheb* was installed in the Hari Mandir (the Golden Temple at Amritsar). This book later came to be known as the *Guru Granth Saheb*.

The hymns included in the *Granth* were of a highly poetical order but in a simple language so that even the illiterate peasantry could understand it clearly. Soon it became the most powerful weapon in spreading the teachings of the Gurus throughout the country. The institution of *Masands* or the preachers was established by the *Granth*. This became very popular and flourished under the Guru's patronage. The Guru provided them with free rations and other necessities so that they could devote themselves completely to the work of spreading the true religion, without any distractions. People in large groups began to reach Amritsar to have darshan of the *Pothi Saheb*. This caused a lot of distress to the orthodox Hindus and Muslims. They went to Emperor Akbar with their complaints.



However, the emperor's policy was usually that of religious tolerance and liberalism. He paid no heed to the complaints of these laymen. He announced clearly that their policy was that of non-interference and he expected this from people of all faiths.

Things were going on smoothly for a while till the appearance of Chandu Shah on the scene. He was a Hindu banker from Delhi who wielded a lot of influence at the Mughal court. He had a daughter of marriageable age, and so he was on the lookout for a groom for her. Since he was originally from Punjab, he wanted his son-in-law to be a Punjabi. He sent his emissaries all over Punjab to find an eligible match for her, but they found none who suited Chandu Shah's requirement. Eventually, on their way back they visited Amritsar and saw Hargobind, the son of Guru Arjan Dev. The agents heaved a sigh of relief and hastened to Delhi to inform Chandu Shah about the boy. Chandu Shah, however, was a man with an inflated ego, who could not imagine giving his daughter to anyone who was below his standards in any way. And so he rejected Hargobind's proposal on the ground that his family lived on offerings and had no tangible social or political position. The proposal was thus dropped and forgotten

but not before Guru Arjan Dev heard about it. Some Sikhs came to know of Chandu Shah's remarks and conveyed it to the Guru. At that time the Guru kept silent since he knew the time was not right to retaliate. However, Chandu Shah's agents kept searching everywhere and were unable to find anyone better than Hargobind.

Time was passing quickly and his daughter was unable to get married. Her mother was really worried and tried to convince Chandu Shah that there was no better match for their daughter than Guru Arjan's son. She implored him to renew the proposal. Chandu Shah also realised his mistake and he sent his agents to the Guru immediately to finalise the proposal. But when the agents reached Amritsar, the Guru turned down the proposal. He repeated the words of Chandu Shah and told his agents that the daughter of such a rich man like Chandu Shah could not fit into the house of a poor person "who lived on offerings alone". When Chandu Shah heard of it, he was furious and shocked. He could not imagine how anyone, not even the Guru, could turn down the offer. In his fury, he decided to avenge himself on the Guru for the extreme insult hurled at him.

He did not have to wait for long for an opportunity. Prithi Chand, the Guru's elder brother, who was still bitter about the Guru complained to Chandu Shah that the holy *Granth* compiled by Guru Arjan contained many derogatory remarks and references to Muslim and Hindu prophets and saints. When Chandu Shah heard of it, he decided to use this as his weapon. He immediately sought the Mughal Emperor's audience and made him aware of the complaints and rumours being circulated about the Guru.

When Akbar received more and more complaints including that of the Mughal courtier Chandu Shah, he decided to look into the matter. So he ordered that the Guru and the holy *Granth* be brought before him. Guru Arjan sent Bhai Budha and Bhai Gurdas to the Mughal court with a copy of the Holy *Granth*.

Akbar had met most of the Gurus and he held them in great esteem. But since so much was being said of the Holy *Granth*, he asked Bhai Budha to read it out to him. However, on hearing it he found the complaints to be absolutely baseless and unfounded. He had always looked upon the Sikh Gurus as social reformers and believers in the unity of God

and the brotherhood of man. And all this was close to his heart. In fact, *Pothi Saheb's* very first verse convinced the Mughal Emperor about the baseless charges levied by religious bigots out of sheer jealousy and malice towards Guru Arjan Dev. He criticised them publicly and began to ponder over the verses in the holy book. He asked for the glorious words from the Holy *Granth* to be read to him again, and this time too he was delighted to listen to the hymns. Each was more nobly inspired than the earlier piece. Far from finding anything that could be construed as maligning anyone, he felt that the hymns inculcated love and devotion and strove to rid both the Hindus and the Muslims of the communalism that was tearing them apart. He was surprised to realise that this was exactly what he had wished to project through *Din-i-Ilahi* — a religion that combined values of both the prevailing religions. The king was happy to be acquainted with the highly inspiring volume compiled by the Guru.

He was so taken in by the intense and rich meaning enshrined in the verses, that he resolved to have Guru Arjan's darshan as soon as possible. He then declared that there was nothing objectionable in the holy book,



and that he was pleased with the noble work that the Guru was doing. Not only that, he also offered financial help if the need arose. He was really happy to be acquainted with the highly inspiring volume compiled by the Guru. He bestowed robes of honour on the Guru along with numerous gifts. He also promised to pay his respects to him personally.

The emperor kept his promise and came on a pilgrimage to Amritsar. He was greatly impressed with the activities of the Guru. He made rich offerings and sought his blessings for the peace and welfare of the kingdom. At the Guru's request the king also waived the revenue due from the peasants of Punjab as they had suffered a severe drought that year. When the cultivators came to know of this, they were deeply grateful to the Guru.

THE LAST YEARS

Unfortunately, Akbar died soon after and the struggle for the Delhi throne began between his son, Jahangir, and grandson, Khusro. Jahangir's son, Khusro, had a lot of respect for the Guru. When he was defeated in the battle, he left for Punjab and sought refuge with the Guru in Amritsar. The Guru told Khusro clearly that his house gave shelter to people of all faiths and castes, but since his case involved a royal battle he could not shelter him as it was against his norms. Khusro understood the Guru's statement clearly, and respectfully took his leave. However, his forces had not even crossed Jhelum when the royal Mughal forces surrounded them. Khusro was taken prisoner to Lahore, where he was put to death. The royal forces then began looking for those people who had lent a helping hand to Khusro.

Chandu Shah, who was still bitter about his experience with the Guru, saw this as a

golden opportunity and began to incite Emperor Jahangir against him. He told the emperor that Guru Arjan had tried to help Khusro and that he had proof of it. Jahangir, meanwhile, had developed a strong hatred for the Guru since he attracted a large number of followers from all sections of the society. Sometimes the entire village bowed to him and this aroused Jahangir's jealousy due to which he became vindictive. And so, even though he knew that the Guru had tried to explain to Khusro his policy of non-interference, he saw this as a good pretext for putting an end to the Guru's activities. Thus he immediately ordered the Guru to be arrested, and brought before him.

When the Guru received the emperor's summons he knew what he had in mind. He called Hargobind and had him installed as the sixth Guru in the presence of the permanent Sikhs. Entrusting the seat of the Guru to him, Bhai Budha applied the tilak on his forehead. Guru Arjan told Guru Hargobind that it was time for him to sacrifice his life for their religion. He was not in the least perturbed or frightened. There was a sense of pride glowing in his eyes, since he was glad that he was required to do what he

had always preached and strongly believed in. He asked Guru Hargobind to do his best to continue the tradition of the Sikh Gurus. He explained to his son that the emperor was panicky because of the new awakening among the Sikhs, and that he had to sacrifice his life for the cause of his faith and justice. His final message to his son was to arm himself fully and prepare for the struggle ahead, which was to be a long-drawn-out war against tyranny. The Guru then took leave of his Sikhs, and bidding farewell to his beloved city of Amritsar left for Lahore.

The emperor levied a fine of rupees two lakhs and asked the Guru to revise the Holy *Granth*, deleting all references to Islam and Hinduism contained in it. The Guru refused to pay the money since he considered the money to be the sacred trust of his Sikh community. As for the verses in the Holy *Granth*, he claimed that they were verses in praise of God and no one could change them. The emperor was on his way to Kashmir for a pleasure trip at that time, and he did not want anything to hamper it. So he asked Murtza Khan to deal with the Guru the way he considered best, and proceeded on his journey. Chandu Shah took this opportunity

to poison Murtza Khan's mind against the Guru.

When the Sikhs came to know of the fine, they started collecting funds immediately. But Guru Arjan forbade them to collect the money, since he had done no wrong. The Qazi then ordered the Guru to be tortured to death if he did not agree to delete the supposed derogatory references to Hinduism and Islam in the holy book. For five days Guru Arjan was tortured. He was made to sit on a red hot iron sheet and they also poured burning hot sand over his body. He was told to take a dip in boiling water. Mian Mir, the revered *fakir*, came to Guru Arjan Dev and asked him for permission to punish all those men by his magic powers, but the Guru asked him to have patience and not go against the will of God. Chandu Shah's daughter, on hearing of the torture being inflicted on the Guru, bribed the jailor and took some delicacies to the Guru. She begged his forgiveness tearfully. Guru Arjan Dev refused to take anything from Chandu Shah's house but blessed the lady for her kindness and thoughtfulness.

When the tyrants found that the Guru bore everything with courage and without flinching they did not know what else to do.



One day, the Guru asked permission to take a bath in the river Ravi, by the side of the Mughal fort in which he was imprisoned. Thousands of his followers watched the Guru walk to the river with tears in their eyes. His bare body was full of blisters, and he could not even walk properly due to sore feet. Standing by the river the Guru kept saying that such was the will of God the gift of whose Name, he always sought. Then he waved to the vast bewailing multitude and walked into the river as serene and calm as ever. This was the last his disciples saw of him. He never came out of the water. It was May 30, 1606, and the Guru was only forty-three years old at that time. Accepting the will of God, Guru Arjan gave up his life suffering inhuman atrocities.

EPILOGUE

The death of Guru Arjan Dev was a great event in the history of India, and it gave a new turn to the events in the country. With his martyrdom the attitude of the Sikhs towards life changed. Emulating the Guru, they could now readily give their lives for any cause dear to them. While Guru Arjan Dev's policy of non-violence and the method of supreme sacrifice reflected best the teaching of Guru Nanak, the training he gave to his successor Guru Hargobind showed his farsightedness. The news of Guruji's sacrifice spread like wildfire throughout the country. His disciples began to weep bitterly but eventually took comfort in the realisation that he was not really dead. He was their immortal Guru.

During his time, there had sprung a kind of civic administration under him which collected the offerings of the people at large for the upkeep of the Sikh cities, temples and tanks. The *Guru-ka-langar* also flourished a

lot in his time. He had said distinctly and specifically that he who finds the way to peace or liberation, earns his own living, and gives something out of that in charity. He had always made it known to his disciples and even to others that he was always there for their protection and support, and that their sincere prayers to him would never be in vain. One of Guru Arjan's maxims in life was to embrace him who sought his protection. He considered it the duty of all religious teachers.

The Guru also emphasized over and over again to never worship a man. According to him, there was no difference between Guru and God, because a Guru is created by God—by His own divine light. He warned people that if they took to personality-worship for their own selfish reasons, their whole life would be spoiled and wasted. He asked his disciples to always chant God's name, since it was the medicine for all diseases.

Guru Arjan's contribution towards the development and strengthening of the Sikh sect was that he made it into a theocratic community by giving it a code, a capital, a treasury and a chief in the person of the Guru.

The Guru gave his life for the values he cherished. He was the embodiment of all that Guru Nanak and the three successive Gurus

stood for. The Sikhs combined in themselves the best of Islam and Hinduism and dispensed with all rites, rituals and distinctions among men. Sikhism under him comprised only love of God and of humanity. The completion of the holy tank called Amritsar, and the Hari Mandir known as the Golden Temple gave the Sikh community a sense of solidarity. The town of Amritsar grew into a metropolis for the Sikhs all over the world. The Holy *Granth* compiled by Guru Arjan Dev served as the guiding light for people.

The work that Guru Arjan Dev accomplished in his forty-three years was monumental. He also left a massive volume of 2,218 hymns which are not only melodious but also rich with beautiful imageries. His long poem, the *Sukhmani*, the Psalm of Peace, ranks next to the *Japji* in its popularity.

Guru Arjan was a practical saint. Though he asked his son to sit on the throne of the Guru, fully armed and prepared for the struggle ahead, he willingly gave up his life, accepting God's will completely.

Titles in this series:

Guru Nanak Dev

Guru Angad Dev

Guru Amardas

Guru Ram Das

Guru Arjan Dev

Guru Hargobind

Guru Har Rai

Guru Harkrishan

Guru Tegh Bahadur

Guru Gobind Singh