

# Guru Har Gobind

His Life and Teachings



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THE LIFE & TEACHINGS OF

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# GURU HARGOBIND

AMRITA SHARMA

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*To my ideal and adorable  
brother-in-law, Pankaj ji, who I know,  
will always be my favourite.*

## **BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD**

Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru of the Sikhs, came into this world as the fruit of the blessings of Bhai Budha, the revered teacher of the Sikhs. It so happened that the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Arjan Dev, had no son. His wife, Mata Gangadevi, was really keen on having a child.

One day, Guru Arjan sent her to Bhai Budha to seek his blessings. She, however, went to visit the teacher in a big procession, accompanied by attendants carrying gifts and rich food. Bhai Budha was a really simple man and did not approve of all the extravaganza. He refused to even touch the delicacies placed before him. Mata Gangadevi returned home disappointed since the revered teacher had not blessed her. When the Guru came to know of it, he asked her to go again with simple food made by her own hands, with all the humility of a devotee.

Mata Gangadevi did as she was told. Bhai Budha accepted her food delightedly and blessed her. Then he crushed an onion with his fist, and told her that her son would crush the enemies just as he had crushed the onion. He also told her that her son would be a great sportsman, who would be very fond of hunting. He would ride royal horses and wear two swords, and possess both spiritual and temporal powers.

Soon after, Mata Gangadevi was expecting her first child. At that time, the Guru got the information that at the malicious instigation of Prithi Chand, his elder brother, the feudal chief of the Mughals, Sulehi Khan, was out to arrest him. At the advice of Bhai Budha, he left Amritsar with his wife for Badali. It was here that Guru Hargobind was born, in 1595. There was great rejoicing in Amritsar at the happy news. The child was named Hargobind, and he was the cynosure of all eyes at Badali.

This news, however, perturbed Prithi Chand a lot. He very badly wanted his son, Meherban, to succeed Guru Arjan, and the only possible means was to get Hargobind out of the way. He and his wife decided to get the child killed. For this, they hired an old family





nurse of the Guru and bribed her to kill the child. The nurse poisoned her nipples and plotted to kill the child by making him suckle the poison. But when she actually took the child in her lap, she fainted, as the poison had started working on her. The Guru immediately rushed to her side and she was saved. When she regained consciousness she confessed her guilt. Prithi Chand was still undeterred by his first failure. Soon after, he got a snake charmer to release a poisonous serpent in Guru Arjan Dev's courtyard to kill the child. But when the snake came near the child, he picked it up and began playing with it. The poisonous snake did not harm the toddler.

A few days later, Hargobind was stricken with a severe attack of smallpox. Prithi Chand fervently hoped that the child would not survive. But Hargobind recovered from the illness much to the chagrin and disappointment of his uncle, and soon became hale and hearty.

One day, Prithi Chand bribed a domestic servant in the Guru's household to poison Hargobind's milk. But when the servant gave the glass to him, the child refused it, despite the servant's persistent requests. Finally, he threw the bowl of milk, spilling the contents



on the floor. A dog who was closeby came to lick it, and died instantly.

He was now fairly grown up and his father decided to send him to Bhai Budha to be trained for the responsibility he was to shoulder in the future. He feared nothing and no one. He had deep regard for his teacher from whom he learnt various languages and the religious scriptures of the Sikhs. However, his formal education was short-lived.

Around that time, a Hindu banker of Delhi who wielded a lot of influence at the Mughal court was looking for a suitable groom for his daughter, who was well into her marriageable age. Being originally from Punjab, Chandu Shah was keen that the groom should also be a Punjabi youth. He wanted a boy who was rich, handsome, brave and cultured. With these particulars, he sent his emissaries to find a groom. However, these men went all over Punjab but was unable to find a suitable match for Chandu Shah's daughter. Eventually, on their way back they happened to visit Amritsar. When they saw the young son of Guru Arjan, they decided that their search had come to an end. Besides being young and handsome, he was also to succeed his father.

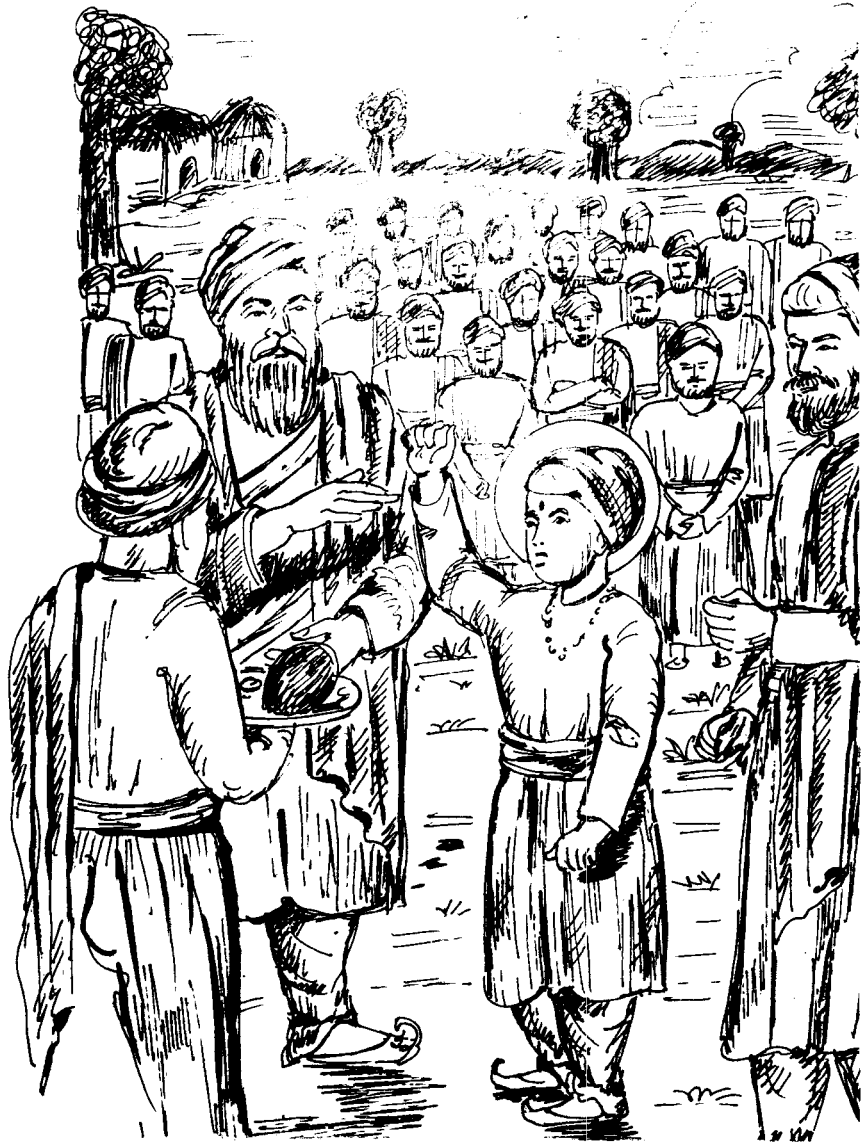
With all these information the agents hurried back to Delhi to inform Chandu Shah. He, however, was a very proud man with a big ego. He could not imagine giving his daughter in marriage to anyone below his status. According to him, Guru Arjan's family lived on offerings and they had no social or political position. He rejected the proposal saying that a brick baked for a palace cannot be used for a gutter. Hearing this, the agents became silent, and the issue was dropped.

Meanwhile, the Sikhs in Delhi came to know of Chandu Shah's remark, and they duly conveyed them to the Guru. It so happened that the agents were sent again in search of a suitable hand for the banker's daughter, but they met with no success. Since the girl was well past her marriageable age, she was becoming a source of grave anxiety to her parents. Chandu Shah's wife, who had also heard about Hargobind, felt that he was an excellent match and she rebuked her husband for turning down the proposal. He too began to realise his mistake and so decided to renew the proposal. He sent his agents to Amritsar again to finalise the match.

But the Guru, who had heard of his earlier remark declined the offer. Chandu Shah took

this as a grave insult and incited Emperor Jahangir against the Guru by informing him of the meeting of his son and rival Prince Khusro with the Guru in Amritsar. He also complained that the holy book, *Adi Granth*, contained some derogatory remarks about Islam. Jahangir, already hostile to the Sikhs and jealous of the Guru due to his large followers, immediately ordered the Guru to be arrested and brought before the court in Lahore.

When Guru Arjan received the summons, he knew what the king had in mind. So, before departing he called his son, Hargobind, and entrusted the seat of the Guru to him. Bhai Budha applied the *tilak* on Hargobind's forehead in the presence of prominent Sikhs. He told Hargobind that the time had come for him to sacrifice his life for their *dharma*. He asked his young son to continue the tradition of the Sikh Gurus. For this, he also gave an injunction to the new Guru that he should sit on the throne fully armed, and also maintain an army and utilise it as and when the need arose. He took comfort in the fact that the sixth Guru was installed before he met his fate. Then he took leave of his beloved Sikhs, and bid farewell to Amritsar.



Guru Arjan Dev was then taken to Lahore, where he was tortured for many days. Finally, the Guru sacrificed his life for the cause of his faith and justice. Emperor Jahangir had confiscated all the property belonging to the Guru. When Guru Hargobind heard of his father's brutal death it shook him badly, and he emerged as a man of steel. The shattered and despaired Sikhs gathered around the eleven-year-old boy, who had succeeded his father as the sixth Sikh Guru.

## **THE WORK BEGINS**

Guru Hargobind was only eleven years old when he was given the responsibilities and duties of a Guru. Even though he was of a tender age, he was well aware that his reverent father had sacrificed his life for the cause of his faith and justice. He knew that a big struggle lay ahead of him since he had ascended the throne in such turbulent times. But all this did not perturb him in the least. In fact, it made him more determined than ever to continue the work that was assigned to him by his father, the martyr Guru, and by God Himself.

He bravely listened to all the people who came to him with their accounts of how his father was brutally tortured to death. It did not weaken or frighten him in any way. Instead, it made him more resolute than ever to fight the tyrants. He was immensely proud of his father who had suffered so much at the hands of cruel fanatics, but had not given in. With every detail of the gruesome and



tortuous death of his father, Guru Hargobind grew more determined that he would not, at any cost, let his father's sacrifice go to waste.

He knew that his first responsibility as a Guru was to boost the morale of the people, and strengthen them against tyranny and oppression. He tried his best to give shape to Guru Arjan's desire. When Bhai Budha, the old Sikh teacher, brought him *seli*, the sacred headgear of renunciation that Guru Nanak had worn and bequeathed to his successors, Guru Hargobind put it aside respectfully, and asked for two swords instead. He wore one on each side representing *shakti* (power) and *bhakti* (meditation).

He propounded the new theory of the soldier-saint by combining in him *piri* (renunciation) and *miri* (royalty). As a result of this, his disciples called him a 'soldier-saint'. He infused courage and bravery in his soldiers by his impassioned speeches. He made it compulsory for his disciples to learn martial arts along with religious and spiritual knowledge. He asked them to wield various weapons and learn horse-riding. He issued a proclamation to the *masands* (chiefs) of nearby places that he would be pleased with gifts and offerings of arms and horses. He made arrangements for imparting training to



the Sikhs in the art of fighting. Hunting was practised regularly to provide useful training in war exercises. The Guru himself learnt the use of offensive and defensive weapons besides riding, hunting, wrestling and many other sports.

Bhai Budha was glad to witness the emergence of a Guru who was worthy of his seat, and said that he was not only the breaker of enemies' ranks but also a lover of mankind. Soon the people responded to his call. Within a short span of time, the strength of his army increased to five hundred. It seemed that Guru Hargobind was obsessed with the idea of making his Sikhs stronger to face the prevailing tyranny and oppression. Most Hindus had become so weak with fear that they could not even dream of resisting the rulers. But under the guidance and command of the Guru, the Sikhs became aware of the need for assertion to protect their social, political and religious rights.

The Guru made them realise that self-denial was not a virtue, but an act of cowardice when faced with a cruel ruler. The Sikhs no more believed in renunciation of their dues. They began to wield arms freely and lived an active life of warriors. The Guru gave them the proper balanced training due

to which they learnt neither to frighten anybody nor be frightened by anybody; so much so, that people began to regard them as guardians. The Sikhs and the Guru learnt to rear horses and ride on them. The Guru built forts and battlements for the safety and security of his people and the city.

The Guru also maintained a regular army with various cadres. The heroic youths joined him in large numbers irrespective of caste and creed. The Guru's Sikhs were now the glorious manifestation of his new concept of soldier-saints.

The Guru continued his preparations and strengthened the city of Amritsar by constructing a fort called Lohgarh. He built other forts and battlements, donned a royal turban and was soon known as *Saccha Badshah* — the true king. Bhai Budha, however, did not really understand Guru Hargobind's strategy. But the Guru reminded the old teacher of his prediction which said that he would crush his enemies. Bhai Budha found it very difficult to reconcile to Guruji's way of life and there was a little misunderstanding between the two for sometime.

Guru Hargobind's daily routine was to get up early in the morning, take his bath in the

holy tank and then meditate. Then he joined his disciples for prayers, after which they went out for hunting. He always wore royal dresses and kept two swords on either side. His new theory was accepted by people with great enthusiasm. Everyday, he sat on a throne and received visitors and offerings like any other ruler. In 1609, Guru Hargobind built a common meeting place for Sikhs called *Akal Takht* or the throne of God. Soon it became the seat of preaching and praying, and discourses were held on the problems and welfare of the Sikhs.

The morning services were held by the Guru in the Hari Mandir where *gurbani* (religious scriptures) was recited regularly. Here visitors came with their petitions, and their grievances were heard and redressed. Thus, Guru Hargobind encouraged them to settle disputes themselves. A new awakening was thus manifested in the Sikh community under the Guruji.

Chandu Shah began to hatch yet another conspiracy of inciting Emperor Jahangir against the Guru. He immediately wrote a long letter to the Mughal emperor about the Guru encouraging treason against his empire, which he warned must be controlled. He kept poisoning the emperor's ears against

Guru Hargobind. Jahangir was already apprehensive of the situation in Punjab. Reading the letter he became more alert and ordered his two faithful lieutenants, Muhammad Beg and Wazir Khan, to summon Guruji to Delhi. Wazir Khan, who had great regards for the Guru, was rather sad that the unpleasant job was assigned to him, but he respectfully told the Guru that Jahangir wanted to have his darshan and implored him to let him escort them to Delhi. The Guru, who understood the whole thing clearly, assured Wazir Khan that he would accompany him, and that the lieutenant need not be apologetic about it.

The Guru then left for Delhi and many of his followers accompanied him. In Delhi, he stayed at *Majnu-ka-tila* near river Jamuna. When Jahangir met Guru Hargobind for the first time he was completely won over by his youthful charm and holiness. He asked the Guru why he was giving military training and spiritual lessons to his disciples. The Guru replied that he only wanted his men to be valiant as well as spiritually wise. He also said that brave subjects always made a king more powerful than others. The Guru's powerful argument influenced Jahangir considerably, and he made him his royal

guest. When Chandu Shah heard of it, his jealousy knew no bounds. He began to hatch a conspiracy again to create a rift between the emperor and the Guru.

Since Jahangir knew that the Guru was a great lover of sports he often invited him to accompany him on a tiger hunt. One day, on one such hunting spree the emperor was attacked by a ferocious panther. The sportsmen accompanying the royal party got really scared, and the horses and the elephants went berserk. The bullets and arrows shot at the tiger kept missing. The beast was about to pounce upon Jahangir when the Guru came to his rescue, and pulling out his sword he killed the panther. The emperor was full of gratitude and began to respect the Guru even more. He was filled with admiration at the way the Guru had risked his life, and the heroic fight he gave to save his life. He became so fond of him that he invited him to accompany him wherever he went.

Once while visiting Agra, the emperor happened to be relaxing under a tree. A poor grass-cutter, who had heard about their visit, came there and offering a two-paise coin pleaded with him to wash his sins and deliver him from the cycle of life and death. On





hearing this the emperor smiled at the man, and pointing to the Guru told him that he was the true king. Jahangir had finally realised that the true king was one who gave eternal peace and deliverance.

The Guru had not yet mentioned the injustice done to his father by the emperor. He was actually biding his time and looking for a suitable opportunity to bring up the issue with the king.

Chandu Shah, meanwhile, was very unhappy at the turn of events. He was constantly looking for an opportunity to have the Guru fall out of favour with Jahangir. His prayers were answered when the emperor fell seriously ill at Agra. The court physicians tried everything but could not cure him. When the emperor decided to consult the astrologers, Chandu Shah seized his chance. He bribed a renowned astrologer to tell the emperor that his malady was not due to some internal malfunctions of the body, but due to unfavourable conjunctions of the stars. He added that this could be cured only if a holy man went to the Gwalior fort and offered continuous prayers there, suggesting Guru Hargobind as the noblest and holiest of all men. The emperor thought about it for quite sometime and seeing no other way out

decided to request the Guru to go to Gwalior and undertake the penance for the king. Guru Hargobind was aware of the intrigue of Chandu Shah, but he readily agreed and went to the Gwalior fort with five of his disciples. On reaching there, he found that there were fifty-two kings held as captives in that fort as they had offered support to Prince Khurram. These men were very pleased to have the Guru with them. The Guru was able to improve their deplorable conditions. He began to impart knowledge about devotion and spiritual wisdom.

Meanwhile, Chandu Shah conspired with Haridas, the governor of the fort, to poison the Guru. But Haridas happened to be an ardent devotee of the Guru and he flatly refused to connive with Chandu Shah. He also disclosed the nefarious intentions of Chandu Shah to Guruji.

Several months had passed and there was no news of the Guru from Delhi. The king had, meanwhile, recovered completely from his ailment, but had not yet invited the Guru back. Haridas, the governor of the fort, wanted to go to the emperor himself, and remind the king of his responsibility towards the Guru. But he was also aware of the influence that Chandu Shah exercised with

the king, and so could not take any step towards the Guru's freedom. After a long time when no message came from the king, the Guru began to actually feel like one of the prisoners who were detained in the fort.

In Punjab, his disciples were growing rather restless. His mother requested Bhai Budha to fetch the Guru back. When he visited the Guru he found him almost a captive in the fort. He told the Guru that his followers and family were getting restless for him. The Guru assured him that he would be back soon.

Soon after, Wazir Khan, the Guru's great devotee, managed to mention to the emperor how the Guru continued to be confined in the Gwalior fort. He said that since he had recovered completely, it was only proper that the Guru be invited back to Delhi and duly honoured. But when the messenger reached Gwalior to escort the Guru to Delhi the latter refused to leave the fort unless the kings detained in the fort were also released. At first Jahangir did not agree since they were political prisoners and were detained for either committing a default in revenue payment or for involvement in the rebellion of Prince Khurram. But Wazir Khan reminded him that he owed his recovery from the

malignant malady to Guru Hargobind's prayers. The emperor agreed and the Guru left the fort along with all the fifty-two prisoners who were awaiting their death. These men rejoiced and celebrated their new freedom. They threw themselves at the Guru's feet and begged him to make them his disciples. They implored the Guru to do whatever he wanted with their lives, since he was responsible for giving them a new life. The Guru welcomed all the men into his group and turned them into soldiers. The portion of the Gwalior fort where the Guru dwelt got the name *Bandi-Chhor Sthan* (place of prisoners' release).

When Guru Hargobind reached Delhi, Emperor Jahangir accorded him a warm welcome and made arrangements for his stay in Majnu-ka-tila. It was here that the Guru told Jahangir that there was no such thing as unfavorable stars, and it was the emperor's good deeds alone that had saved him. He also told him that he should continue to have faith in God. He then told him of Chandu Shah's intrigues and of how he had tried to poison him at Gwalior fort. The emperor, already aware of Chandu Shah's villainy, handed over the criminal to the Guru to avenge his father's death. At the Guru's suggestion his

disciples, Bhai Vidhi Chand and Jethaji, held Chandu Shah and tied his hands and feet with their *pugrees* and paraded him in Delhi. In the same prison-like condition he was taken to Lahore. Here he was produced as a culprit before the public, since it was because of him that Guru Arjan Dev had to sacrifice his life.

When the emperor heard about the Guru's desire to return home he suggested that he accompany him to Kashmir where he was going to spend his summer. The Guru then left with the royal caravan. But when they reached Goindwal the Guru, who was feeling restless to meet his family, asked for leave to go to Amritsar. The emperor, who really wanted Guru Hargobind to accompany him, changed his programme and decided to go along with the Guru to Amritsar and visit the Hari Mandir.

During his visit to Amritsar, as the Guru's guest, Jahangir asked the Guru how he desisted from committing sins of any sort. At this, the Guru was really amused, and he replied to the emperor in a parable. He told Jahangir about a king who was given to a real sinful living. One day, he met a religious man and asked his help on how to refrain from sinning. The holy man calmly looked at him

and told him that he had only eight more days to live, which he could spend by either remembering God or by sinning. He left the choice completely to the king, who, on hearing all this, became very panicky and aggrieved. He began to pray fervently day and night, and also fed the poor and needy sincerely. He did not think of sinning even for one moment of his life.

Hearing this parable, Emperor Jahangir got his answer. He realised that all the people who remembered death found it very difficult to commit sin.

The emperor stayed with the Guru in Amritsar for a few days, after which they left for Lahore.

One day, as Chandu Shah was being paraded in the streets, a grain parcher, who had seen Chandu Shah torture Guru Arjan Dev, hit him with a pair of burning hot tongs and killed him. His body was then thrown into the river Ravi. When Guru Hargobind came to know of it, he asked God to pardon his sins since he had already suffered enough. After that, Emperor Jahangir left for Kashmir with his queen, Nur-Jahan, and the Guru sought permission to stay back in Lahore.

## THE IMPENDING DOOM

Jahangir died in the year 1627, and his son, Prince Khurram ascended the throne, assuming the name Shah Jahan. He was not a tolerant emperor like his father and his attitude towards non-Muslims was hostile.

When the Guru was still in Lahore, one of his devotees in Kabul purchased a horse worth one lakh rupees for the Guru. On the way, the local official, Attock, noticed the horse and stopped it. When the Sikh said that it was for the *Sacha Badshah* or the true king, the king's men captured the prized horse. When the Guru learned of this he became determined to have the horse back somehow. As for the horse it stopped eating in the royal stables, and would not let the emperor mount him. The horse was finally put in charge of the *qazi*. As he was leading the horse to his house, he happened to pass the Guru's tent. Almost by miracle the horse began neighing wildly. When the Guru came out and offered





to purchase it, the qazi was happy to sell the bony and dying horse for ten thousand rupees. The horse, however, regained his appetite and health, and soon the Guru was mounting the horse in full glory. The qazi felt cheated and complained to the emperor.

Around the same time, one of the qazi's unmarried daughters had heard a lot about Guru Hargobind from a devotee in Lahore called Mian Mir. She began talking of the Guru very fondly. This angered the qazi very much. So he decided to put her to death. The girl informed Mian Mir, who advised her to escape to Amritsar and seek refuge with Guru Hargobind. The girl came to Guru Hargobind's door, and he had a special pavilion built for her. Later, she became one of his most ardent devotees and was called *Kaulan* (lotus). The Sikhs anticipated an attack by the emperor's forces for the horse and Kaulan, but nothing happened.

Guru Hargobind had been married for quite sometime now, but he was still without a child. During a visit to Guru Nanak's shrine, he and his wife sought the blessings of Baba Sri Chand, Guru Nanak's son, for a child in their house. In 1613, Bibi Damodari, Guruji's wife, gave birth to a son who was named Gurditta (gift of the Guru). In 1617,

another son was born to the Guru, and was named Suraj Mal. In 1618, Guru Hargobind had a third son, Ani Rai, followed by Atal Rai in 1620. In 1622, Tegh Bahadur, the fifth son and the ninth Guru of the Sikhs was born to Guru Hargobind.

Guru Hargobind was always very close to his devotees, and it did not matter whether they were near or far, whether they could hear him or not, or even whether they thought of him or not. Around this time, in Srinagar, there lived an old woman named Bhagbhari. She was a staunch devotee of the Guru. She thought more of him than even of herself. She had made a fine silk robe for him, and longed to present it to him. But the Guru was hundreds of miles away in Punjab, and there was no way he could know that. Besides, she was too old to travel all the way and present it to him. However, so strong was her faith that she knew that the Guru would be coming any day to receive the gift. Her faith was not belied, for before long, the Guru visited her. The first thing he did when he came to her door was to ask for the robe she had made for him. The old woman's joy knew no bounds when she presented it to him. After all these years of labour, during which she remembered the Guru every moment, her

wish had been fulfilled. She was so happy and content that she wanted nothing more from life. She breathed her last before him. Her house was then converted into a gurdwara. It continues to be a place of pilgrimage even today.

The Guru treated all his devotees with equal affection, and always strove to inculcate a strong feeling of brotherhood, solidarity and comradeship between them. On his way to Srinagar, the Guru happened to spend a night with Kattu Shah, another devotee, who had recently been converted. The Guru was very pleased with him since he took good care of him.

About the same time, some Sikhs of a nearby village heard that the divine master was visiting Kashmir, and they set out to pay homage to him. They brought with them a pot of expensive fragrant honey. On the way, they too happened to spend a night with Kattu Shah. When he heard that they were carrying fragrant honey for the Guru he requested them to let him taste it. The Sikhs who had laboriously collected the honey for their Guru, refused to let him even touch it. When they arrived in Srinagar and made their offering to the Guru, they discovered that the honey had started to stink. The Sikh devotees hung their

heads in embarrassment. The Guru then told them that they should not have refused Kattu Shah, who was a Sikh like them, a taste of their honey. It was then that the devotees realised that the Guru was always watching them, and was aware of all their thoughts.

Similarly, one day a young orphan boy, met a party of Sikhs proceeding to Amritsar to pay homage to the Guru. He also joined the party as one of their attendants running errands for them. Once, it so happened that while he was away bringing water for them the Sikhs moved on. As the youth hurried to catch up with them he was spotted by a Pathan traveller who made him carry his luggage. The boy insisted on being allowed to join the party of Sikhs, but the Pathan refused to release him.

One day, the youth happened to meet a masand to whom he communicated his longing to meet the Guru. The masand could not free him since Muslims were the rulers of the country at that time. Yet he assured the destitute boy that he would carry his message to the Guru. The boy then took out a *kauri* from his pocket, and gave it to the masand. He requested him to take it as an offering to the Guru. The boy felt very helpless at his state and thought of his Guru sincerely. While on

the way, the Pathan decided to rest a while under a tree which was close to an old well. It so happened that after a little while the Pathan walked upto the well, and to the youth's amazement, the moment he stepped on the platform it gave way and he was buried in the debris. The youth could not believe his good luck when he opened the bundle that he had been carrying. He was amazed to see that it contained jewellery and thousand gold *mohars*, and several other rich clothes and gifts. The youth decided to carry all these to the Guru as gifts.

On the way, during nightfall he stopped at a wayside house for shelter. The lady of the house had a glimpse of the precious bundle and so she decided to steal it. She conspired with her friend next-door to murder him and rob him of his belongings. Meanwhile, her husband returned home and seeing a stranger sleeping outside on the verandah took him in and made him sleep on his bed, while he slept outside. The friend came in the night as planned and killed the husband, believing him to be the traveller. When the murder was discovered the next morning, the wife could not believe her ill-luck. The youth by then had safely moved on, grateful to the Guru for saving his life. When he reached the

Guru and offered his gifts, he smiled and returned it all to the youth as a reward for the kauri he had sent him.

This period was a peaceful one for Guru Hargobind. At this time, he had eight hundred horses in his stables, three hundred troopers on horseback, and sixty men with firearms in his service. He also enlisted bands of Pathan mercenaries. A Pathan chief named Painde Khan became one of his most trusted commanders.

One day, an unexpected tragedy struck the Guru's household. His elder son, Baba Atal Rai, heard one morning about the sudden death of his friend, Mohan, who had been bitten by a snake the night before. Atal Rai, in a fit of passion, touched the dead body of Mohan with his hand who immediately came alive.

When Guru Hargobind, who was holding his darbar at that time, heard about it he was furious and scolded Atal Rai for going against the rules of God. Atal Rai begged forgiveness but Guru Hargobind was very angry and said nothing. The sensitive boy left the darbar and went to Hari Mandir. After his morning prayers he gave up his spirit to God. When the Guru heard of it, he was very sad. But he

consoled everyone by saying that Atal Rai had attained immortality.

Life went on as usual and then, suddenly, an armed conflict was thrust upon the Guru. One day, in 1628, Emperor Shah Jahan was out hunting near Amritsar, where the Guru was already on a hunting expedition. The emperor had a white hawk which he had bought from Iran. The hawk was set free in the forest and the emperor chased it, unaware that it was being pursued by the Guru too. Soon the emperor was tired and he left for Lahore giving instructions to his men to capture his hawk. During the hunting spree, however, the hawk fell in the Guru's disciples' hands. When the royal soldiers came to get it the Guru refused since it had come in their shelter. The Guru's party was attacked and in the skirmish that followed the emperor's men were wounded and driven away.

Shah Jahan's men returned empty-handed and exaggerated the incident tremendously to the emperor. Shah Jahan was enraged and ordered Mukhlis Khan to fetch the hawk back at any cost. Mukhlis Khan, with a huge chunk of the royal army, reached Amritsar. This was going to be the first armed conflict between the mighty Imperial forces and the Guru's army.





It happened to be the wedding day of the Guru's daughter, Bibi Viro, with Sadhu Ram of Malla village in Amritsar district. When the Guru heard of the approaching army he remained calm and serene, and asked the marriage party to wait at Jhabal. Guru Hargobind then ordered his men to organise defence at Lohgarh fort. All the disciples of the Guru fought valiantly, and slew the commander, Mukhlis Khan, thus, emerging victorious.

The same evening he performed his daughter's marriage. Everyone beheld the courage, fearlessness and fortitude of their Guru. After the marriage, the Guru and his family shifted to Kartarpur. While still there, Guru Hargobind went out hunting one day, and came across an enchanting spot on the bank of the river Beas, near the ancient village of Ruhela. The Guru decided to found a new township here called Hargobindpur.

Bhagwan Das, the headman of the Gherar tribe, was not very pleased about this since he knew that the Mughal emperor did not like the Guru. He thought that if he supported the Guru in any way then the king might misunderstand. However, the people of the village were very excited; they placed their lands happily at his disposal, and wished him

to found the new city as soon as possible. They were thrilled that the Guru was going to be amidst them.

One day, Bhagwan Das made some derogatory remarks about the Guru during one of his prayer-meetings. The Sikhs lost their temper and a fight ensued. The angry Sikhs killed Bhagwan Das and threw his body into the river. At this, his son Ratan Chand went to the *subedar* of Jullandhar, Abdullah Khan, and asked him to take action against the Guru. Chandu Shah's son, Karam Chand, also joined hands with Ratan Chand. Abdullah Khan, who was aware of the king's displeasure at his army's defeat at the hands of the Guru, realised that it would be an excellent opportunity to win his favour by capturing or killing the Guru. So he immediately ordered his troops to attack the Guru. His army consisted of noted fighters like Bairam Khan, Balwant Khan, Ali Batsh and the like.

When the Sikhs were attacked, Guru Hargobind gave charge of defense to Bhai Kalyana, Bhai Nana, and others. He inspired his men by telling them that they were not fighting for the territory, but for the preservation of their religion and way of life. He was aware that it was not an easy task

since the enemy troops were huge and powerful. However, the Sikhs fought with all their strength and faith. They were all willing to lay down their lives for their Guru. Then, one after another, the Mughal soldiers started falling in the battelfield. Mohammad Khan, Bairam Khan, Balwant Khan, all died at the hands of the valiant Sikhs. The Guru also threw himself into the fight, and soon the Mughal soldiers fled the battlefield to save their lives. After this conflict, Hargobindpur was completed by the Guru. He also made sure that along with the gurdwara, a mosque was also constructed in the town.

People continued to bring offerings to the Guru. A party of masands (chiefs) visiting Kabul brought with them two beautiful horses, Dilbagh and Gulbagh, as gifts to the Guru. The horses were rare chargers and very glamorous. On the way to Amritsar, however, the horses were seized by the Mughal officials and presented to the Governor. A devotee of the Guru, Bhai Bidhi Chand, who was also a highway man of the Majha forest became furious on hearing about this incident. He decided to retrieve the horses for the Guru, even if he had to steal them. He asked for the Guru's pardon before acting on it. Soon Bidhi Chand left for Lahore. By a feat of rare

bravery and courage he freed the horses from the royal stables and offered them to the Guru.

The emperor was very upset at the news and decided to wage a war against the Guru. On the advice of Sardar Rai Jodh, the Guru withdrew deeper into the forest and camped near Nathana tank (which was the only tank for miles). The Mughal army, under Lal Beg, attacked the Sikh army and a fierce battle followed for eighteen hours. The Sikhs fought bravely and routed the Imperialist army till they retreated. The Guru then distributed the booty among the poor and needy. Here Guru Hargobind got one more tank made to provide drinking water for his army. It is now called *Gurusar* or Guru's tank and is now a holy place of pilgrimage.

Soon it was the festival of *Baisakhi*, and thousands of people gathered at Kartarpur. A devotee, Chatta Sain, presented a horse, a hawk, a dress and some sophisticated weapons to the Guru. The Guru presented all the articles to Painde Khan, who was one of his most pampered *sardars*.

One day, the prized hawk which the Guru had presented to his eldest son, happened to fall into the hands of Asman Khan, Painde Khan's son-in-law. Instead of returning it, he

concealed it and planned to give it to the emperor, and earn huge rewards. When the Guru summoned Painde Khan, to question him about the lost hawk, he came in the ordinary dress of a common citizen rather than in his costly costumes and ornaments. When the Guru asked him about his strange appearance, instead of owning up his mistakes, he persisted in making false statements. The Guru, however, recovered the hawk from Asman Khan and terminated Painde Khan's services and expelled him from the *darbar*. Painde Khan felt humiliated and swore revenge on the Guru. He then went to the Mughal court and offered to join the Imperial forces against the Guru.

In 1635, Guru Hargobind went with his family to solemnize the marriage of his elder son, Baba Suraj Mal. There his youngest son was also betrothed to Gujari, the daughter of Bhai Lal Chand and Bishen Kaur. But as time passed, ominous signs of a gathering storm could be seen on the horizon. Painde Khan, who had joined the forces of Jullandhar's Mughal commander, Subedar Qutb Khan, was waiting for the right moment to strike back. Both of them reached Lahore and were presented before the emperor. Painde Khan told Shah Jahan that the Guru's

army was disorganised at that moment, and it was the best time to strike. Shah Jahan immediately despatched an army of 50,000 soldiers under the leadership of Kale Khan, to surround Kartarpur where the Guru was staying. A fierce battle was fought, and many of the Guru's disciples were killed. Kale Khan's entire army was wiped out in the first encounter. Guru Hargobind gave strict instructions to his soldiers that they were not to fire at the fleeing soldiers.

Painde Khan was supported by Kale Khan, Qutb Khan and Asman Khan. Guru Hargobind decided to confront Painde Khan himself. When he advanced the Guru asked him to seek forgiveness for his misdeeds, but he attacked the Guru instead. The Guru saved himself and struck Painde Khan who fell to the ground, mortally wounded. The Guru dismounted from his horse and taking his old protege in his arms, asked him to read the *kalma* in the hour of his death. But Painde Khan died before he could open his lips. Guruji was deeply moved by his death and he took out his shield to shade his face from the sun. Kale Khan, the Mughal commander, Qutb Khan and Asman Khan, were all killed in this battle. Many of the

Guru's men were also killed. The remaining Sikhs managed to escort Guru Hargobind to a safe place from where they reached Kartarpur safely.

At Kartarpur the Guru maintained a small army of seven hundred horses, three hundred horsemen and sixty artillery men as his personal body guards. He spent most of his time thinking about his lost friends and disciples.

## THE LAST YEARS

In his last years, Guru Hargobind devoted himself completely to the preaching of the name as ordained by the great master, Guru Nanak. He settled down at Kiratpur, a small town at the foothills of Kehlur mountain range. It was a picturesque and serene place, and it helped him to meditate and worship. The city was founded by Bāba Gurditta, the eldest son of Guru Hargobind.

However, the period of the 1630's was very tragic for Guru Hargobind. He lost many of his near and dear ones. In 1638, his eldest son, Baba Gurditta, died. One day, he had gone hunting when he killed a cow, mistaking it for a deer. When the angry villagers wanted nothing but the same cow alive, Bhai Gurditta touched it with his hands and it came back to life. When Guru Hargobind heard of it, he reprimanded his son for interfering with God's work. Bhai Gurditta then went to Budhan Shah's shrine close by,





and lying down under a sheet of cloth passed away quietly. Soon after Baba Gurditta's death, his two favourite disciples, Babak and Joti Mal, died. During the same period the Guru's second wife, Marwahi, also died. All the deaths happened in quick succession which left Guru Hargobind in a very dismal mood. He meditated silently for many hours of the day. Even at other times he did not talk much to anybody. He gave many sermons to the people gathered around him. All this while, he kept his grandson, Har Rai, close to him and made him watch and learn.

Then one day, he suddenly got a hunch that his end was near. He sent a message to all his disciples, friends and relations all over the country to reach Kiratpur at once. Preparing for the last journey, he distributed his property among all those who had a claim to it. The Sikhs came in multitudes to pay homage to their much revered and beloved Guru.

In front of a huge assembly of devoted men, women and children, the Guru consecrated his successor. Taking Har Rai by the hand, he seated him on the throne of Guru Nanak. Bhai Bhana, son of Bhai Budha, applied the sacramental *tilak* and decorated him with a necklace of flowers. Then the Guru

bowed before the seventh Guru of the Sikhs, offering him the ceremonial five paise, coconut and flowers. The Guru then addressed the crowd and asked them to recognise Har Rai as their new Guru. His wife, Bibi Nanaki, was not really pleased since she had expected her son, Tegh Bahadur, to be the next Guru. At this, Guru Hargobind told her that Tegh Bahadur was going to be a Guru one day, but the time had not yet come for it. The consoling words of Guru Hargobind pacified Bibi Nanaki.

Guru Hargobind then told his wife, Nanaki, and his son, Tegh Bahadur, to go to the village of Bakala in Amritsar district, and to settle there. The Guru knew that he had very little time with him. He gave strict instructions to his family and the Sikhs, not to mourn his passing away. He desired that when he was gone, they should recite hymns from the holy scriptures.

On February 28, 1644, Guru Hargobind entered the room named Patalpuri, in the building which he had especially got constructed on the banks of the river Sutlej. Before doing so, he blessed all those who had served him with devotion and sincerity. The Guru then entered the room which was closed

from outside by Guru Har Rai. No one was allowed inside for four full days and nights. Hymns in God's praise were sung, *Guru ka langar* remained open all the time and clothes too were distributed among the poor. On the evening of the fifth day, Guru Har Rai opened the door. They found the Guru sitting in a *samadhi* with his back resting against the wall. There was still a glow in his eyes. All the people bowed in reverence before the Guru, whose spirit had quietly coalesced with the supreme being.

## **EPILOGUE**

Guru Hargobind was the first of the Sikh Gurus to have entered upon a military career. He gave a new turn to the Sikh way of life. He turned saints into soldiers and yet remained a man of God. He believed that in the times they were living in, religion could not be separated from politics. He infused courage and strength into his people, and made them men of steel. His resorting to arms was justified since he always fought for truth, justice and defence. He also paid a lot of attention to the spiritual enlightenment of his disciples.

He also concentrated on social development and reforms of the people. He detested miracle-making, since he found it wrong to interfere with the ways and rules of God. He was a just warrior who always fought against injustice and showed the righteous path to the distressed humanity. He was an amazing combination of a man of action and meditation. He was truly a soldier-saint.