

Guru Har Krishan

His Life and Teachings



THE LIFE & TEACHINGS OF

**GURU
HARKRISHAN**

AMRITA SHARMA

Singh Brothers
Publishers, Booksellers, Exporters

Sole distributors:

Singh Brothers

Publishers, Booksellers, Exporters

Head Office: Bazar Mai Sewan,

Near Harmandar Sahib, Amritsar-143006 Tele: 254 5787

Showroom: S.C.O. 223-24, City Centre,

Near Guru Nanak Bhawan, Amritsar-143 001,

Tele: 0183-255 0739 Telefax: 0183-254 3965

E-mail: singhbro@vsnl.com URL: www.singhbrothers.com

Originally published by

STERLING PRESS PRIVATE LIMITED

A-59, Okhla Indl. Area, Phase-II, New Delhi-110020

Tel: 26386165 Fax: 91-11-26383788

E-mail: sterlingpublishers@airtelbroadband.in

Website: www.sterlingpublishers.com

© 2006, Sterling Press (P) Ltd.

Reprint 2012

All rights are reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Illustrations by Virendra

Printed at Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi-20.

CONTENTS

1. Early years	5
2. The Root of the Problem	11
3. Ram Rai's Betrayal	16
4. Crowning the Guru	21
5. Seeds of Discontent	27
6. Raja Jai Singh and the Royal Summons	33
7. A Lesson in Humility	41
8. Destination Delhi	50
9. The Guru and the Mughal Prince	57
10. The Fatal Attack	63
11. Epilogue	68

EARLY YEARS

It was July 7, 1656, and a great year for the Sikh community. Their seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai, had just been informed of the birth of his younger son, and his heart was brimming with joy. When the Sikhs in the holy town of Kiratpur received the good news they were ecstatic. They sang praises of the newborn baby and danced in joy. They thronged the Guru's house to catch a glimpse of the boy and brought with them all kinds of gifts to share and express their happiness.

When they saw the newborn child they were struck by the glow on his face, and the divine light that emanated from the whole being. Everyone thought that he was imagining it, and yet he could not get it out of his mind. Little did they know that this younger son of Guru Har Rai was carrying the flame of Guru Nanak in his being, and would become their next Guru. They blessed him with all their heart and some Sikhs were so



overwhelmed in his serene presence that they could not help touching his feet. In return the boy would smile and gaze at them with a wide look, which assured them that there was something special about him which only time would tell.

Guru Har Rai was delighted on seeing his second-born son, and when he glanced at his face he felt that his son could be his true successor. So struck was he by the resemblance the infant bore to Guru Nanak, that he was awed. Soon the family priest came to bless the newborn child. After much consultation the boy was named Harkrishan.

Everyone in the house adored and pampered him. As a child Harkrishan was an extremely charming and an attractive-looking boy. He was of fair complexion and had remarkably sharp features for his age. Whoever came to pay the Guru a visit could not help observing him as he played nearby. When he looked at them with his big, bright eyes they were awed by his divine expression and the glow on his face. So enchanted were they by his face that they automatically bowed to him in respect.

Harkrishan was an animal lover. He used to love being with animals and spent hours tending to them. He would feed them with

utmost care even before he ate any food himself. His father, Guru Har Rai, was very fond of hunting but he never killed any animal. He would catch them alive and then release them in the zoo which he had made for them. Guru Har Rai too noticed his son's love for animals. He would often join Harkrishan whenever he was tending to them or playing with them.

Harkrishan had a very soft heart and he would cry whenever someone got hurt. He could not bear to see anyone in pain and did his best to help others in any way he could. This brought him close to many people, and they loved and adored him.

Guru Har Rai's devotees used to sometimes tell him, jokingly, that his son was doing God's work already in his own little ways. Though Guru Har Rai smiled at their comments he was actually very proud to see his son so close to the people's hearts. Although Harkrishan was a lively and a normal child, sometimes Guru Har Rai noticed him sitting in a quiet, solitary place, all by himself, lost in deep thoughts. That far-away look in his eyes would always make the Guru feel apprehensive. Whenever he asked Harkrishan what he was thinking, the four-

year-old boy would sigh and ask his father why there was so much pain in this world. The Guru would then explain to him the golden teachings of Guru Nanak, and the meaning of the verses in the holy book. He would listen enraptured and take in every word clearly. When he was not playing with his friends or looking after the animals he would be with his father, by his side, as he read out the holy book to his devotees.

Harkrishan's friends used to dote on him. They never played without him, and if he did not feel like playing they would sit and listen to him singing. Harkrishan had a very melodious voice and he used to love singing devotional hymns. Most people, including Guru Har Rai, were amazed that he remembered most of the hymns from the Holy *Granth* by heart. When he sang in his soft, nightingale-like voice, everyone stopped their activities, and listened with rapt attention. Some of them even gathered around him, as they were so strongly drawn to his voice. Even Guru Har Rai felt that he sang from the heart and that was why it touched so many people. Harkrishan too enjoyed himself most when he sang his favourite hymns in praise of all the Gurus. What amazed most people was

that a four-year-old child could quote verses from the Holy *Granth* so appropriately and accurately.

Most of the time Guru Har Rai's devotees used to gather around Harkrishan to hear him recite verses from the holy book which sounded so simple and yet so divine coming from him. Most people would, spontaneously, go and touch his feet whenever they heard him sing and recite the holy hymns.

Guru Har Rai observed this and found it very strange that such a small child could inspire such feelings and reactions in other people. He often wondered if Harkrishan would succeed the throne after him. And it was not long before the future events actually decided who the next Guru would be.

THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

The Mughal empire had just been taken over by a new emperor. This period was marked by treachery, betrayal and unfair succession. The reigning king, Shah Jahan, had just been usurped by his third son, Aurangzeb, while his heir-apparent, Dara Shikoh, Aurangzeb's eldest brother, had been driven away from the kingdom.

But Aurangzeb was not satisfied with that. So he ordered his men to chase Dara Shikoh and bring him back to be executed. There was an atmosphere of tension and terror everywhere. Aurangzeb had it publicly declared that whoever gave any protection or shelter to Dara Shikoh would be severely punished, and even executed for aiding an enemy of the king. As a result of this, no one in the whole Mughal empire dared to help Dara Shikoh even though they all sympathized with him.

The prince ran helter-skelter from the pursuing soldiers, and finally, he reached Kiratpur. He was aware that Guru Har Rai had once saved his life, and he was sure that he would help him again. With this hope, he landed at the Guru's doorstep. When the Guru was informed of his arrival, he himself came to welcome the prince who was exhausted and weary from being on the run for so many days. He gave him food and shelter, and assured him of all the help that he could provide. To him, anyone who came to his doorstep for help would never return disappointed.

When the Mughal army came to the Beas river, which flowed past Kiratpur, Guru Har Rai and his Sikhs stalled them till Dara Shikoh could escape. By the time the Guru let the soldiers pass the prince was far-off. However, the soldiers chased him for days on end, till they finally caught him and got him back to Delhi. Aurangzeb then had him executed after declaring him a religious traitor.

Aurangzeb was quite aware of the role the the Sikhs played in helping Dara Shikoh, and he was very upset. He had also heard about the power and authority displayed by the



Sikhs on innumerable occasions against the Mughals. Though he wanted to punish the Sikh Guru for helping Dara Shikoh, he gave it a second thought. He was aware of the popularity of the Sikh Guru and the influence he wielded over his people. Being a shrewd and a calculating person he realised that if he captured the Sikh Guru and had him executed the whole Sikh population would turn against him. Therefore, he dropped the idea of capture.

Aurangzeb noticed the vast number of devotees that the Guru had, and thought that if he could convert the Sikh Guru to Islam then the whole Sikh population would join the Muslim religion. The thought pleased him so much that he decided to devise a plan by which he could lure the Sikh Guru to his court and then gradually, into the Islamic fold. He needed a concrete reason to invite the Sikh Guru.

One day, his minister told him that some of the courtiers claimed that the holy book of the Sikhs contained derogatory statements against Islam, which was very upsetting. This immediately gave Aurangzeb an opportunity to summon the Sikh Guru to his court. He sent a messenger with a notice that a few of

his courtiers had raised objections to some verses in the Holy *Granth*, and he wanted the Guru to come and clarify it with them.

Aurangzeb also thought that when the Guru would come to his court he would ask him to perform some miracles. If he succeeded, then he would consider him a man of God and convert him to Islam. Otherwise, he would declare him a fraud and have him imprisoned. With these thoughts in mind he eagerly awaited the Guru's arrival.

RAM RAI'S BETRAYAL

When Guru Har Rai received the royal summons he was sure that there was more to it than met the eye. Even his devotees were of the opinion that the Mughal king was trying to lure the Guru into a trap and they warned him against accepting the invitation. On the other hand, some even expressed their fears that if the Guru refused to go then the king would take a deep offense.

At this point, Guru's older son, Ram Rai, came forward and expressed strongly that the invitation should most definitely be accepted. According to him it was a friendly gesture and thus should not be refused. He emphasised that there was nothing to fear, and that good relations with the Mughals would benefit them all. At his insistence it was decided that the invitation would be accepted, but someone else would represent the Guru in the Mughal court. Since Ram Rai was so keen on it everyone suggested that he would be the best



choice. This way the invitation would be duly honoured and they could also learn the motive behind the invitation. Ram Rai willingly accepted the duty and responsibility of representing the Sikh Guru in the Mughal court, and prepared to leave.

But before he left, Guru Har Rai instructed him very strictly and clearly about a few things. He told him that under no circumstances would he dishonour the Sikh Gurus or the Holy *Granth*. He was to interpret it just as it was without any compromise on its meaning. He also asked him not to indulge in miracle-making since it was against their religion to interfere with the Guru's ways, and especially not to impress others. Ram Rai assured the Guru that he would abide by all the instructions, and thus left for Delhi.

When he reached the Mughal court, he was asked to read the verses of the Holy *Granth*, and explain it to the whole community. Ram Rai began reciting and explaining the holy book, and was doing fine till he came to a line, "The ashes of the Mussalman get into a potter's clod." At this, the whole court began voicing their displeasure, and Ram Rai who did not want to



make the Mughal emperor angry at any cost, immediately assured them that it was an error and the original line did not mean anything like this, since it read, "The ashes of the faithless get into a potter's clod! Thus, by changing the word that was originally written in the holy book Ram Rai saved his neck, but betrayed his father, the Holy *Granth* and the whole Sikh community.

Aurangzeb who was pleased with his servility before him, presented a *jagir* or a piece of land to him in return. Ram Rai was very pleased with himself. Soon after, Aurangzeb asked him to perform some miracles. Ram Rai gave no second thought to it. He immediately set about performing one miracle after another, and was thrilled when the courtiers applauded him. Impressed by his show Aurangzeb presented the robe of honour to him, along with other expensive gifts. Ram Rai was more than satisfied with his mission.

CROWNING THE GURU

Soon the whole Sikh community heard of what had transpired in the Mughal court and were shocked. When Guru Har Rai heard of it he was very distressed. So deep was his grief at what his own son had done that he refused to speak to anyone for a few days.

Harkrishan who was a mere child of five, saw his father's grief and was deeply anguished. He knew his father's need to be alone at that time, and so he kept all the Sikhs away from him. He would take his father's place during the morning prayers and sing the devotional hymns before the gathering of Sikhs. He would recite verses from the Holy *Granth*, and the Sikhs would be so lost in his divine voice that they would forget the absence of their Guru, and did not feel lost without him.

The Guru's family too were amazed at the fact that such a small child as Harkrishan could enthrall a crowd that was not only big,



but even much older than he was. In spite of this, they could not help feeling drawn towards his voice and his utterances.

When the Guru finally came out of his shell he declared to his assembly of Sikhs that from now on they would have nothing to do with Ram Rai, who had not only misinterpreted their Holy *Granth*, but also betrayed the Sikh community, and all the Sikhs before him. He declared that he had disowned Ram Rai from his family and community for the cowardice he had displayed at the Mughal court. He also said that what Ram Rai had done was sacrilege since he had gone against the holy words of Guru Nanak by distorting its meaning. He said that he was not only hurt but ashamed of Ram Rai, and hoped that the next Guru would wash away the blemish caused by him. Saying this, he announced that he was appointing his younger son, Harkrishan, as the next Guru of the Sikhs.

All the devotees present were very pleased with the choice, as they themselves were not only fond of Harkrishan but even admired and respected him. They immediately fell onto the child-Guru's feet in numbers, and sought his blessings. Guru Har Rai called

their family priest, Bhai Bhana, son of Bhai Budha's, to apply the tilak on Guru Harkrishan's forehead, and formally install him as the Guru of the Sikhs.

Thus, at the tender age of five, Guru Harkrishan became the eighth Guru of the Sikhs. It was the year 1661, when Guru Harkrishan took over the mantle of the Guru from his father. Guru Har Rai died the same year after leaving the throne of the Gurus in safe hands. He knew that most people would be skeptical about making such a small boy their Guru, but he was also aware that Harkrishan would prove himself to be worthy and remove all doubts. As for the Sikhs, they had already accepted Guru Harkrishan as their Guru long before he was formally appointed as one. They were already familiar with his sublime words, his divine appearance and his gentle nature. They had felt an intimate link with him ever since he was born, and they were all jubilant when he was made their Guru.

Within no time, Guru Harkrishan very smoothly took over as the spiritual leader of the people. Though his Sikhs were not the least surprised it, however, amazed people from other sects to see such a young boy as the

Guru. But when they sat down to talk to him they were astonished by his wisdom and knowledge. Whoever met him once could not help being impressed by his maturity and wisdom.

Before long, Sikhs of all ages began coming to him with their problems and doubts, and Guru Harkrishan after listening to it patiently would offer his advice and suggestions. Soon the Sikhs were so influenced by him that Guru Harkrishan's advice became the last word for them. They would touch his feet with all respect, and swore that they could indeed see the light of Guru Nanak reflected in his child-like face. He carried a mature head on his shoulders, and was open to suggestions from all quarters of his community be it his family or his devotees, and this virtue endeared him to many.

In fact, it was their common love for him that brought all the Sikhs together, and made them stronger than ever. The Guru made sure that the langar or the free kitchen was maintained well and functioned as efficiently as before. The Sikhs made sure that the kitchen was well-stocked. They served hundreds of devotees everyday with full

dedication and warmth. All this pleased the Guru very much, and he would often appreciate the good feelings with which they performed their work. In return, the Sikhs were encouraged to do more and more for the good of their community.

SEEDS OF DISCONTENT

Sadly enough, the succession of Guru Harkrishan on the throne of Guru Har Rai was not so smooth. In fact, it was very much in keeping with what the third Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Amardas, had told his daughter, Bibi Bhani, long ago. It so happened that once Guru Amardas told his daughter to ask him for a boon. Bibi Bhani asked that the guruship, which was now with her father, should remain in her family forever. At this Guru Amardas was quite upset because the guruship was to be determined on merit and not on heredity. Though the Guru granted her the wish, he told her that it would not be without unpleasantness and heart burnings in the process.

This is exactly what happened when Ram Rai learnt that his father, Guru Har Rai, had appointed his younger brother the Guru of the Sikhs over him. He was so furious when he heard this that he immediately went to

Aurangzeb and complained. He requested the emperor to do something about it, and also expressed his desire to be made the Guru, since he was the first-born, and guruship was his birthright. He was distressed by the fact that he was not only deprived of the guruship, but even of the vast property and wealth of his father which had gone to Harkrishan. He raged wildly that he would not stand for it, and implored upon Aurangzeb to help him get his due share.

Aurangzeb, who had no real concern with Ram Rai except for sowing seeds of differences among the Sikhs, promised all his help to Ram Rai. He wanted the two brothers to fight amongst themselves so that the Sikh community would gradually become weak as a result of the rift, and then he would be able to convert most of them to Islam. With such thoughts Aurangzeb not only expressed all his sympathies with Ram Rai, but also turned him against the whole Sikh community. Ram Rai became more adamant to set things right for himself. With Aurangzeb's support behind him, he declared himself to be the rightful Guru of the Sikhs in Delhi. He also announced that all gifts and donations which were to be made to the Guru should now be



made to him instead, in Delhi or else they would have to face severe consequences by the Mughal army. He also appointed his own masands or agents in different places so as to force the Sikh devotees to come and visit him, instead of Guru Harkrishan. Like him, his masands too behaved badly with the devotees, and took the money forcibly from them.

Gradually, things went out of hand and the devotees, under the true guidance of their Gurus, stood up for themselves and refused to pay up to the masands. They were all courageous and bold, and would often give the agents a dose of their own medicine. Soon, the masands began returning with a bad name, and no money.

This angered Ram Rai a lot and he decided to complain to Aurangzeb once more. However, around this time one of his agents came to him with a vital piece of information. He said that before dying, Guru Har Rai had strictly instructed Harkrishan to never see Aurangzeb, since he was well aware of his vileness. All the Sikhs were aware of this instruction to the Guru. When Ram Rai heard this he was very pleased. He suddenly realised that if he asked Aurangzeb to call the Guru to his court for a visit, the Guru would

be in a fix. If he came he would be going against his father's orders, and hence betraying his promise to him. This, he expected would immediately turn the Sikhs against the Guru, and he would stand a good chance. On the other hand, if he refused the invitation, then the emperor would get offended, and hence take serious actions against him. This would again strengthen his chances of becoming the Guru, especially with Aurangzeb behind him.

With these thoughts in mind, Ram Rai approached Aurangzeb and begged him to summon Guru Harkrishan to his court. He also demanded that the seat of the Guru be given to him. He even tried to poison Aurangzeb's mind by saying that Guru Har Rai had not made him the Guru because he had befriended the Mughal emperor. He also put it across very subtly to Aurangzeb that if he wanted to prove his authority to the Sikhs, he should dethrone Harkrishan and appoint him the new Guru. The emperor too realised that it was an appropriate time to start a fight in the Sikh court regarding the guruship of the two brothers.

Besides, he was also aware that if Guru Harkrishan continued to be the Guru, then

the Sikhs would grow stronger and more powerful everyday. While if he made Ram Rai the Guru then he would have complete control over the vast Sikh population. So, he decided to call Guru Harkrishan to his court.

RAJA JAI SINGH AND THE ROYAL SUMMONS

Aurangzeb was a very shrewd and a conniving ruler, and a lot of thinking went into his actions. Even when he had to call Guru Harkrishan to his court, he chose a senior court official, Raja Jai Singh, for this purpose. Aurangzeb was well aware that he was an ardent devotee of the Sikh Gurus, and he knew how difficult it would be for him to do this job. Yet, he put the responsibility of getting the Guru to his court on him.

Now Raja Jai Singh was also aware of the promise that Guru Harkrishan had made to his father about not seeing Aurangzeb. He was now in a great dilemma since he knew that the Mughal king would be angry if he did not get the Guru to Delhi. He also realised that it would mean bringing harm to the Guru and the whole of the Sikh community. Raja Jai Singh thought hard about it the whole night. At first he thought of refusing the king,

but then he realised that the king would deploy somebody else for the same task and it would not solve anything. Finally, he decided to send word to the Guru about the big problem that lay before him. He knew that only the Guru could get him out of this problem, and he decided to abide by whatever the Guru asked him to do. So, the next morning he sent his most trusted servant to Kiratpur with the royal summons, along with a letter explaining everything.

When Guru Harkrishan received the royal summons and read the letter he understood the predicament of his devotee. He assured the messengers that he would find a way out somehow, and do what was best for everyone. Hearing such noble words of assurance the humble messengers' minds were put to rest. They realised now, why all the Sikhs were so devoted and loyal to their new Guru who was all but eight years of age. His words of wisdom and his maturity belied his age, and it inspired these men to touch his feet and seek his blessings. Immediately, Guru Harkrishan called his Sikhs to a meeting along with his family members, and discussed the issue in his *darbar*. All the Sikhs were aware of Guru Har Rai's instructions to Guru Harkrishan



regarding Aurangzeb, and they all realised that the royal summons were all Ram Rai's doing. They were well aware of his motives behind provoking Aurangzeb into calling the Guru to Delhi. Some told the Guru to defy the royal orders, and that they were ready to fight if the Mughals attacked. But Guru Harkrishan did not want any unnecessary bloodshed. In fact, he was aware that it was to avoid such fights with the Mughals that his father had asked him to never meet or see Aurangzeb.

But, his family and other Sikhs said that the royal summons could not be ignored, and that the Guru should go to Delhi. Otherwise it would mean offending the king and starting a battle. Guru Harkrishan meanwhile, thought about it day and night. He hated the idea of going against his father's wishes, but he was also very concerned about Raja Jai Singh. He did not want him to get in any kind of trouble with Aurangzeb. When he was unable to come to any conclusion himself, he thought about what his father would have done in such circumstances. He realised that Guru Har Rai would have done anything but disappoint someone who looked to him for help. With this realisation his duty was clear to him. He

decided to go to Delhi since it was the only way he could help Raja Jai Singh.

In his letter, Raja Jai Singh had suggested that the Guru need not meet Aurangzeb at all once he came to Delhi. He could just stay there for a while, and meet all the Sikhs who were dying to have a glimpse of him and then return to Kiratpur. This idea quite appealed to Guru Harkrishan, and he decided to go to Delhi.

Next morning, he informed his community about his decision, and the Sikhs were very pleased with the consideration he showed to his devotee, Raja Jai Singh. His family too expressed their approval, even though they were as sad as the other Sikhs were at his impending absence. Soon after, Guru Harkrishan sent back one of the messengers to Raja Jai Singh informing him of his decision to come to Delhi. When the raja heard this he was so grateful to the Guru that his eyes filled with tears. He knew that the Guru was coming to Delhi only because of him. He quickly informed Aurangzeb that the Guru was coming to Delhi, and the emperor too looked forward to his coming, although for a different reason.

When the Sikhs in Delhi heard the news, they were thrilled beyond words. They had

always longed to meet the Guru, but had long given up hope for fear of Aurangzeb. Now their joy knew no bounds, and Raja Jai Singh could not help wondering if God had ordained this visit so that the Guru could personally cater to their spiritual needs. He too began counting the days like the thousand others.

Soon the Guru set out for Delhi along with his family, who begged to accompany him. As word spread around about the Guru's departure, multitudes of Sikhs came from all over and joined him at every stage of his journey, just to catch a glimpse and pay their respects to him. The crowd began growing day by day, and people thronged in thousands to touch his feet and seek his blessings. Whoever saw the Guru could not take his eyes off the angel-like face. A divine aura surrounded his whole body and it transfixed anyone who set his eyes on him. A certain fragrance spread all around whenever he passed by. The aroma everywhere was as if they were walking in a garden full of flowers. Guru Harkrishan would often sing hymns from the Holy *Granth* and the people would listen with rapt attention as he sang the praises of God. There was no one who was not deeply moved by his holy hymns, sung in his melodious voice.



They kept following him as he moved on towards Delhi, and before long, the crowd grew so large that there was no space left on the road.

A LESSON IN HUMILITY

When they reached the village of Panjokhara near Ambala, a very fascinating incident took place. When the people came to know that Guru Harkrishan was in their village they were thrilled beyond words. They left all their work and ran out to pay their respects to him.

As they began collecting around the Guru in big groups one brahmin, who lived in the same village happened to pass by and see the large crowd. Curious at what the excitement and gathering was all about, he went forward to see it for himself. When he saw that all the people were excitedly rushing to catch a glimpse of a boy, who was not even eight years old, he began scoffing at the people. He was amused at the ignorance and the rusticity of the simple people who were ready to accept just anyone who claimed to be a Guru. All the Sikhs around heard it and so did Guru Harkrishan, who merely smiled at the

arrogant brahmin and shook his head. His devotees were really angry and wished that the Guru would teach him a good lesson. But the Guru let him go on about how superior his religion was, and how naive and illiterate the Sikh people were, since they were blindly showering their devotion on a mere child of eight. As if this was not enough, he began objecting to the Guru's name too. He said that Krishna was the name of their God who gave the divine message in their holy book—*Bhagvada Gita*. The brahmin further argued that since 'Har' meant greater than, was the Sikh Guru then trying to imply that he was superior to Lord Krishna? If so, then the Sikh Guru would have to prove his abilities to him by a discourse on *The Bhagvada Gita*.

All the Sikhs gathered there by now had enough of his arrogant words. One young Sikh in that group, Chhajju, who worked as a water-carrier decided that it was time to teach the proud brahmin a lesson. He came forward and volunteered to discuss *The Bhagvada Gita* with him. At this, the brahmin scoffed and mocked the water-carrier saying that a book of that calibre was much beyond an illiterate, rustic like him. But Chhajju, stood his ground and challenged the brahmin to a



debate saying that even a simple water-carrier like him, knew more than the brahmin could ever learn in his life. Determined to show the illiterate villager down, the brahmin agreed to discuss *The Gita* with him. At this, Chhajju went over to Guru Harkrishan, and touching his feet sought his blessings. The Guru smiled at him and touched the devotee's head with his wand. Then he bade him to go forward with his errand. Thus the brahmin and the water-carrier sat down face to face and began their discussion.

The brahmin was literally taken aback when Chhajju began talking about *The Shastras* and the various philosophies enclosed in *The Bhagvada Gita*. As the discussion went deeper and deeper, the brahmin's head went lower and lower. He was amazed that a simple, ignorant man could have so much knowledge about *The Bhagvada Gita*. He began sweating profusely when Chhajju started talking about issues that even he was not aware of. The water-carrier explained clearly *The Vedas*, *The Shastras* and other religious ideas which revealed his indepth learning, and clear understanding of the book.

The brahmin now realised his folly and immediately fell on the Guru's feet. He had seen for himself how a simple and rustic villager had been transformed into a learned scholar, and it had all been made possible because of the Guru's powers. He clasped Guru Harkrishan's feet humbly and begged his forgiveness. He was convinced that this eight-year-old boy was only an illusion; in reality he was God himself. He pleaded with the Guru to accept him as his disciple and to allow him to serve him. The Guru then told him that he did not have to serve him to be his disciple. If he followed the teachings of the Sikh Guru's sincerely, then he would in reality be serving him.

He then explained to the brahmin that pride and arrogance were to be discarded like dirty clothes. He said that these were enemies of man since they separated man from his fellow-brothers, and always created ill-feelings. He told him that Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion, was the most humble of all men, and he considered humility to be the most important virtue among men. He told him that pride deprives a man of all the good things among people, and humility gives him everything without his

even asking for it. Finally, he told the brahmin to always remember that pride never wins and humility never fails. The brahmin then touched Guru Harkrishan's feet and promised to live his life according to the teachings of Guru Nanak and Guru Harkrishan. All the Sikhs present were very pleased and satisfied with the way the Guru had taught the proud man a lesson. They sang their Guru's praises when the proud man went back humbled and reformed.

As more and more people heard about the Guru they eagerly went to see him, and seek his blessings. They brought all sorts of gifts for him, as per their capacities. Some brought simple meals cooked in the home, some got fruits for him and others got flowers from their garden. The Guru accepted all these with great pleasure, and blessed them from his heart. It brought him great joy to see so much affection, adoration and reverence being showered on him. Everyday, more and more Sikhs kept pouring in the village to see him. Thus Guru Harkrishan's movement towards Delhi got slower and slower.

Finally, he realised that he could never get to Delhi if his devotees went with him all the way. So he decided that from then on he

would go alone with his family. He entreated his devotees not to follow him any further, instead to carry on with their work. He knew how much they wanted to accompany him and how disappointed they were at his orders, but he was firm. He made a boundary of sand and told his Sikhs not to cross it after him, till he returned. He assured them that he would be able to go to Delhi faster without them and even return as quickly if he went alone. He then requested them to pray for his hasty return and finally, took their leave.

The Sikhs were very sad to see him go. They wanted to plead with him to take them along, and not deprive them of his presence. But they all stood back, with folded hands, singing his praise. They all knew that their beloved Guru must have had a strong and a valid reason for not wanting his disciples to accompany him. They all touched his feet and sought his blessings. Then with a heavy heart they bade him a fond farewell. They stood watching him leave and stayed there long after he was gone from their view. They all prayed together for his safe journey, and for the success of his mission.

As a tribute, to their meeting and parting with their Guru at that place, all the devotees



decided to build a gurdwara for him. It stands there even today, and is a site of pilgrimage to thousands of Sikhs who visit the gurdwara and pay their respects.

DESTINATION DELHI

As Guru Harkrishan and his family neared Delhi, word began to spread like wildfire in the whole vicinity. People met him at every step and the Guru was greatly touched by their devotion. When Raja Jai Singh heard that Guru Harkrishan had finally reached the outskirts of Delhi, he personally went to welcome him. He was so excited to meet the Guru that he went barefoot.

When he finally saw the Guru standing before him he could not believe his eyes. His heart welled up with gratitude and love, and he prostrated himself before the Guru and touched his feet. Guru Harkrishan picked him up gently and blessed him. Raja Jai Singh requested, with utter humility, that he would be most honoured if the Guru stayed in his house. The Guru accepted the invitation most graciously, and Raja Jai Singh's joy knew no bounds. He respectfully led the Guru to his house, but with great difficulty since

the Guru was surrounded by throngs of devotees wanting to seek his blessings.

Guru Harkrishan too was pleased that this trip had atleast given him a chance to meet such faithful devotees. He was proud of them since they had stuck to their Sikh faith, and followed it sincerely despite constant fear of the Muslim faith and the Muslim subjects.

In fact, ever since Guru Harkrishan came to stay at Raja Jai Singh's house, the faithful devotee did not deprive the others of the pleasure of meeting with the Guru. He opened the doors of his palace and instructed the guards to allow everyone and anyone inside, who wanted to pay homage to the Guru. As more and more people came to know that Guru Harkrishan was in Delhi, the more they came in large numbers to pay their respects and seek his blessings at all hours of the day or night.

Emperor Aurangzeb, who had already heard of Guru Harkrishan's arrival, was quite amazed to see multitudes of people flocking around Raja Jai Singh's palace to visit the Guru. He was quite struck by the devotion the people had for him, and the powerful influence he wielded on his devotees. He had already seen an ordinary

Sikh like Ram Rai perform miracles before him, and he was sure that Guru Harkrishan too possessed some miraculous powers. He tried to instigate his devotees against the Sikhs, and again he called Raja Jai Singh forward for this task.

He asked the Raja as to why they worshipped a mere child as a Guru, and whether they had any proof that he was indeed a man of God. At this Raja Jai Singh firmly and faithfully replied that they needed no proof of Guru's legitimacy. They knew it in their hearts that Guru Harkrishan was their true spiritual leader. But Aurangzeb was not convinced. He asked Raja Jai Singh to think of something by which even he could be assured of Guru Harkrishan's divinity. Otherwise, he threatened that he would take strict measures and appoint Ram Rai as the Guru instead.

So, Raja Jai Singh went home with another problem. This time he could not even tell his Guru about it. He kept worrying about it the whole day. When his wife found him tensed and in deep thoughts, she asked him the reason. He explained the whimsical conditions of Aurangzeb to her. Immediately, she struck upon a plan and told her husband

that she had been wanted to visit the Guru. Since the Guru had never seen her before, they could use this encounter as the test. On hearing this, Raja Jai Singh immediately sat up. He decided that this would be the safest and surest way to test the Guru for Aurangzeb's benefit. So they began to put their plan into action.

The queen summoned all the maids of the palace to her chamber. She then dressed herself in an attire identical to that of the other maids, and prepared to meet the Guru. Raja Jai Singh in the meanwhile, informed the Guru that the maids of the palace wanted to pay their respects to him. When the Guru bade them to come the queen entered with all the other maids. As they came up to him one by one and wished him, the Guru blessed them. But when the queen came the Guru got up from his seat and touching her with his wand, said that he was honoured to meet her. At this, the queen bent down and touched his feet while Raja Jai Singh praised the Guru's divinity. All the other Sikhs who were present at that time, and witnessed this test began singing his glory too.

Meanwhile, Raja Jai Singh had rushed back to the court to inform the emperor of the



success of their plan. He narrated the whole incident to Aurangzeb. The emperor could not help but be convinced that the eight-year-old boy was no ordinary child. He was now anxious to meet the Guru, and thus sent messengers to him with expensive gifts asking for a meeting.

Guru Harkrishan, who was well aware of Aurangzeb's nature, decided not to mince words when dealing with him. He openly told him that his elder brother, Ram Rai, was already at the Mughal court, and that he did not want to get involved in politics at all. He explicitly told the Mughal emperor that he only wanted to be involved in God's affairs, and was instructed solely in preaching the true name of God.

When Aurangzeb received this reply he was astonished. He too realised that the Guru was a child only in appearance, but carried a wise head on his shoulders. He was beginning to realise that Ram Rai was more interested in the wealth and glory that came with the guruship, while Guru Harkrishan was only interested in doing God's work. It was not long before he was proved right. Around that time, an epidemic broke out in Delhi. Thousands of people were struck by plague

that had spread across the length and breadth of the city. Many people who were afflicted by it were brought to the Guru to be blessed. After being cured, these Sikhs begged the Guru to allow them to serve him and devote their lives to him.

Soon the plague subsided completely and the people began to recover. Throughout the city, people sang praises of their Guru and thanked God for sending such a great soul as Guru Harkrishan amidst them. He saved them from sure death. They came to him with gifts of fruits and flowers, of jewelleries and crops, of houses and lands—almost anything that the Guru could use for the Sikh community.

All this, however, made Ram Rai really furious. He was very upset since his whole plan was just not working the way he had planned it. Even the plague that broke out turned to his disadvantage, as the people were now firmly devoted to Guru Harkrishan and were showering endless gifts on him. What irked him most was Aurangzeb's diminishing interest in him, and his increasing interest in meeting the Guru. But for the moment he decided to stay quiet.

THE GURU AND THE MUGHAL PRINCE

As a matter of fact, after this incident of plague, Aurangzeb too was getting to be sure of Guru's extraordinary powers. He was very keen to meet the Guru, but had received no invitation from him yet. So, Aurangzeb decided to send his son to meet Guru Harkrishan instead of him. He asked him to discuss the complaints of Ram Rai with him, so that he could make his decision regarding the both of them. He also sent his regards through his son.

When Guru Harkrishan heard that the Mughal prince had come to see him, he welcomed him generously. He was pleased to see that Aurangzeb had not tried to impose his presence before him, but had shown the good sense to send his son instead. When the Mughal prince first set his eyes on Guru Harkrishan, he was amazed. He wondered how an eight-year-old child with a cherubic

face could become the spiritual leader of such a big community. But as he sat before the Guru and began talking, he realised that the boy was indeed a learned sage, a man of God in the frame of a child. When the Guru asked him the purpose of his visit, the prince told him of Ram Rai's complaints. He told him how Ram Rai objected to Guru Harkrishan's appointment which he claimed was not only unjust but undeserved too. He added that Ram Rai was urging the king to overthrow the Guru, and appoint him in his place.

At this Guru Harkrishan replied very firmly and clearly that a throne is not a personal property to be handed down just by virtue of being the first-born, but it is a 'responsibility' that is handed down to one who not only deserves it, but who even had the capacity to fulfill it in the best possible way. He then told the prince that all the other Sikh Gurus before him had never handed over the throne to their first-borns; instead, they had given it to someone who was most meritorious and worthy, even if it was from the same family. He cited the case of Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, Guru Amardas, who had overlooked their own sons just because they were not competent enough. He



explained that his own great grandfather, Guru Hargobind, had made his grandson, Guru Har Rai, his successor instead of his four sons. And likewise, if his father had chosen his second-born instead of the first, it was because he found him more deserving. The Guru then went on to add that all the other Sikhs would stand by him not because they disliked Ram Rai, but because it was Guru Har Rai's decision, and hence most sacred to all the Sikhs. No true Sikh ever questioned the decisions of their Guru nor tried to change it in any way. This was because they respected their Gurus very much.

In any case, he told the prince that such conflicts were internal issues of the Sikhs. They could solve it themselves somehow, and that it was not fair for the emperor to interfere in any way, since it had nothing to do with him.

The Mughal prince was impressed by his wisdom, and by the polite yet firm manner in which the Guru had made his point clear. He realised that it would be best for his father to keep away from the internal affairs of the Sikhs, if he wanted to avoid causing any undue ill-feelings. He assured the Guru that he agreed with him wholeheartedly, and

promised to speak to his father on his behalf. He then respectfully took his leave quite impressed by the young Guru. His very first meeting with the Guru had turned out to be much different from what he had expected. It was supposed to be an enriching experience for him. He had felt serene and comforted in the presence of the Guru, and wanted to visit him again and again.

When he told his father about the meeting he was impressed too. He had not expected an eight-year-old child to speak so clearly and wisely. More than that he was amazed at the boldness of the Guru, who had stated his opinions so fearlessly before the Mughal prince, without being afraid of the consequences.

Aurangzeb's first instinct was to exercise his authority and summon Guru Harkrishan to the throne, but he realised the futility of it. He let his good sense prevail upon him, and at the request of his son he agreed to stay out of the whole affair. He decided to overrule Ram Rai's claim to guruship and dismissed all charges against Guru Harkrishan. He declared that Guru Harkrishan was deservedly made the Guru, and Ram Rai's claim was invalid. He also sent a message to the Guru through Raja Jai Singh that he

was free to return to his town whenever he wished to do so.

When Ram Rai learnt all this he was wild with rage. He fumed and fretted inwardly, but he could not do anything. He was furious that his plan had failed so badly, and that Aurangzeb had turned against him at the last minute. He decided to keep silent and get even later on. But for now, he was helpless.

On the other hand, when the Sikhs heard the news they were jubilant. They cheered and celebrated the presence of their beloved Guru, and sang his praises. They flocked in thousands around him to express their joy. There were regular darbars held where the Guru sang the devotional hymns, and the whole Sikh community joined him. They went into a trance whenever the Guru's tender and soft voice rang out loud and clear, and they refused to let him out of their sight.

But the Guru now wanted to return home, to Kiratpur. He had been upset for quite some time and was now preparing to leave. But when the Sikhs heard about it they refused to let him go. They pleaded with him to stay on for a few more days which the Guru finally, agreed.

THE FATAL ATTACK

Unfortunately, around that time small-pox broke out in the city, and most people were afflicted with it. Guru Harkrishan was asked to rush back to Kiratpur by Raja Jai Singh to escape the epidemic, but the Guru refused. He told him that his devotees had requested him to stay, and he would never disappoint him in any way, no matter what the consequences.

Raja Jai Singh knew that it was dangerous for Guru Harkrishan to stay in Delhi at that time. He was also aware of the fact that he could never dissuade the Guru to run away from his people in times of such crisis. Guru Harkrishan had also ordered that no one, who wished to see him was to be stopped, whether he was afflicted with small-pox or not. He met each and every one of his devotees and at all hours. To him, it was an honour and a privilege to be there among people who needed him. He was tired, weak and exhausted, but most content. However,

all this took its toll on him, and very soon he too contracted the disease. He lay with high fever and an aching body, but did not utter even a whimper.

Soon his condition deteriorated, and before long he began to find it difficult to even speak. His devotees were really distressed to see him in such a condition, but the Guru assured them that it was all God's will. He quoted Guru Nanak's verse to them, which said, "Whatever pleaseth thee, O God, is good." He told them to have faith in God's ways and not mourn his condition.

When the Guru realised that his condition was worsening day by day he knew that it was a message from God. He then requested his devotees to move him to a house which was closer to the Yamuna river. His devotees, who wanted to do whatever would alleviate his pain to some extent, did as the Guru said. Now with every passing day the Guru knew that it was time to depart.

One morning, he called his Sikhs to his side and asked them to stay together in love and harmony, as they lived now. He asked them to continue with their good work, and serve each other as well as they had served him. Hearing this the Sikhs began to cry, but

the Guru stopped them. He said he was very proud of them, and asked them to always help each other to the best of their abilities.

At this point, one faithful Sikh named Gurbaksh told him that all the Sikhs before him had appointed a Guru who led the Sikhs forward, but he was leaving them behind with no one to carry his light forward and to guide them spiritually. He even added that since the Guru was still much too young to have a son whom he would appoint as his successor, he asked the Guru to stay alive till he had a son. The sikhs feared that if the Guru died without leaving a successor then Ram Rai, who was still very much in Delhi and in Aurangzeb's court, would take over as the Guru. But the Guru shook his head. He gestured to them with his exhausted hand that it was God's will that he die. His voice was really faint now and almost inaudible. He whispered that they need not fear at all, for the flame of Guru Nanak would never die down. When the Sikhs asked who he was Guru Harkrishan could only utter "Baba Bakale". Saying that, his eyes closed forever, and his soul departed for heaven. It was March 30, 1664.



The Sikh devotees could not control their grief. They felt that the light had gone out of their lives and there was darkness everywhere. They wished they knew who the next Guru was and where, so that they could find some relief. It was then that the Sikhs realised that the Guru had said, "Baba Bakale," which meant that his successor was somewhere in the village of Bakala. They decided to go and search for the new Guru after cremating Guru Harkrishan.

Thus, in that sad year of 1664, they bade a tearful farewell to their beloved Guru. The whole Sikh community gathered by the Yamuna river, at a place called Tilokhari, where the Guru was cremated with due honours. People sat there for hours, singing his favourite hymns from the Holy *Granth*, and prayed sincerely that they find the person who deserved to succeed a gentle and a noble soul like Guru Harkrishan.

In times to come, the place where the Guru stayed in Delhi, in the last few days, was turned into a gurdwara. It is known as Bangla Saheb today, and people from all over the country come to visit and pay their respects here. Before long, it became a major pilgrimage site for all the Sikhs.

EPILOGUE

Guru Harkrishan was the eighth Guru of the Sikhs, who had taken over the mantle of the 'Guru' when he was only five years old. He died in 1664, at the age of eight. In the three years that he was the Guru of the Sikhs, he contributed in his own way to the welfare and development of the Sikh religion. His most important task was to tackle his brother, Ram Rai, and the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb. He did this with utmost maturity and wisdom which certainly belied his young age.

In appearance, Guru Harkrishan was a handsome, charming, and a soft-spoken child. He had sharp features which gave his face a very distinct character. He endeared himself easily and strongly to people who were completely enamoured by his child-like innocence and joyous abandon. He was a healthy child not only in body, but in mind too. He had a very strong sense of fair play and justice and it was noticed not just by his

parents, but also by all the other Sikhs. He had a very mature head on his shoulders, which never failed to amuse others. His own father, Guru Har Rai, and the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, were among his admirers for his wisdom.

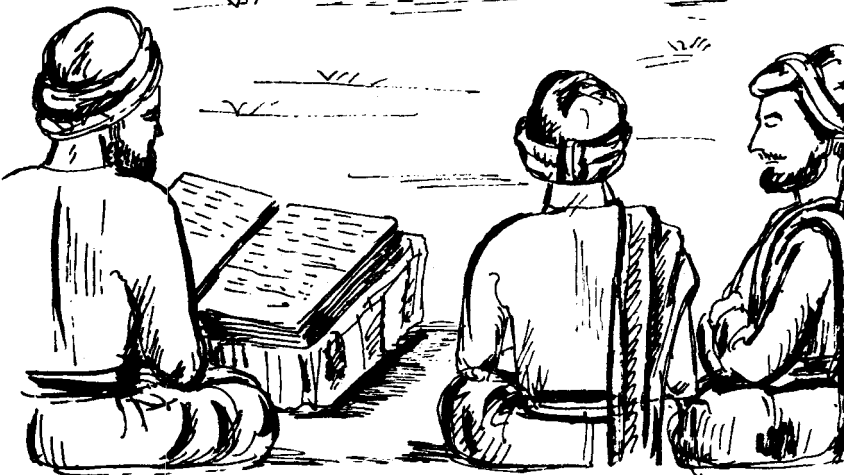
He also exhibited an amazing foresight when he accepted Raja Jai Singh's invitation to visit Delhi since he knew that otherwise, Aurangzeb would harm his sincere devotee, and then appoint Ram Rai as the Sikh's Guru. This would mean causing a rift between the Sikhs and weakening them as a result. He was also capable of taking decisions by himself. He never failed to take the advice of others, and always heard every suggestion sincerely, but ultimately, he made his own decisions.

For a child of his age, he was firm, determined, steadfast and even bold. He remained firm in his decision to never see Aurangzeb since he had promised his father. He also made no indirect statements to the Mughal prince about Ram Rai or about the question of succession, and was bold enough to ask the Mughal emperor to stay out of the internal affairs of the Sikhs. It was these heroic qualities that impressed the Mughal

emperor. He realised the capabilities and qualities of Guru Harkrishan that made him so dear to the Sikh community. He overlooked Ram Rai's complaints, and let Guru Harkrishan remain the Guru.

Guru Harkrishan was a child with the face of an angel and a heart of gold. He felt deeply for his devotees and he suffered whenever his people were in any sort of pain. When they were struck with plague the Guru cured them all because he could not bear to see them suffering. Later, when small-pox broke out in Delhi he refused to leave his suffering devotees behind. He stayed on, till he caught the fatal disease himself, and finally succumbed to it. His life was an embodiment of selfless service, of courage, and of love. He loved his devotees dearly and was loved by them equally. They loved his child-like appearance, his wisdom, his guidance and his melodious voice.

Though Guru Harkrishan did not contribute any verse to the Holy *Granth*, he used to love those verses from the depth of his heart. The verses were divine music and words to his ears. He loved to sing it as much as he loved hearing others sing it. To him, it was the most beautiful link with the divine



and he would often go in a trance when he heard those holy verses or sang it himself.

In his short lifetime, Guru Harkrishan achieved the love, respect and admiration of his people. He even made the relationship with the Mughal prince and the emperor better and friendly with his clarity of thought and boldness of expression. He was gentle yet firm, child-like yet mature, soft yet steadfast, and it was because of all these qualities that the Sikh community placed him on an equal pedestal with all the other Sikh Gurus.

When they all bid farewell to their beloved Guru they wished to pay their tribute in a substantial way. So, they built a gurdwara in his honour, on the same place where he was buried. To this day, devotees visit that holy gurdwara in Delhi, singing songs in glory of their beloved child-Guru.