



# The Turning Point of Sikhism-Creation of Khalsa Panth

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The greatest achievement of *Guru Gobind Singh* was the creation of the Khalsa on the day of Baisakhi in 1699 A.D. With the creation of Khalsa such a brave and self-sacrificing community of Saint-soldiers was born, which completely uprooted the powerful empires of the Mughals and the Afghans in Punjab.<sup>1</sup> That is why the creation of Khalsa is considered as the beginning of a new era. It was a grand creative deed of history which brought revolutionary change in men's minds.<sup>2</sup>

Since the days of Jahangir, the cruelties of the Mughals had been increasing day-by-day. Jahangir had martyred *Guru Arjan Dev* in 1606 A.D. He had imprisoned *Guru Hargobind Sahib* in the fort of Gwalior for some time. *Guru Hargobind* had to fight battles against the Mughals during the reign of Shah Jahan. Aurangzeb crossed all the limits. He got many famous Hindu temples demolished in the country. He had imposed several restrictions on the performance of their religious ceremonies.<sup>3</sup> Those Hindus who refused to accept Islam were ordered to be dismissed from Government service. The Mughal Emperor, Akbar had waived off the Jaziya tax, which had been imposed on the Hindus, but Aurangzeb reimposed this hateful tax. He issued orders to demolish the Sikh *Gurudwaras*. He butchered a large number of non-Muslims, who refused to embrace Islam. On top of all this, he got *Guru Tegh Bahadur* martyred on 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1675 A.D. *Guru Gobind Singh* created the Khalsa to put an end to the growing cruelties of the Mughals.<sup>4</sup>

*Guru Gobind Singh* wanted to put an end to the Mughal empire with the help of Hill chiefs. These Hill chiefs had sided with *Guru Sahib* initially simply to promote their selfish ends. Later on, they betrayed *Guru Sahib* and again went to the Mughals. *Guru Sahib* felt that the Hill Chiefs could not be trusted any more. Therefore, *Guru Gobind Singh*, decided to prepare such Soldiers who as might stoutly resist the Mughals. As a result, *Guru Sahib* brought the Khalsa into existence.

The caste system had been in vogue for centuries in the Indian society. The Indian society was divided into several castes and sub-castes. The people belonging to one caste looked down upon the other castes. The

higher-caste people treated the low-caste people no better than beasts. A man's assessment was made not on the basis of his personal qualities, but on the basis of his caste. Many restrictions were imposed on the interaction of those castes. He, who violated those caste rules was ostracized from his caste.<sup>5</sup> This caste-system was, in fact, eating into the very vitals of the Indian society. All the Sikh *Gurus* before *Guru Gobind Singh* had dealt a severe blow at the caste-system through *Sangat* and *Pangat* institutions but it had not yet been totally mashed. *Guru Gobind Singh* wanted to organize the society which would be free from the shackles of caste system and socially well-knit. So *Guru Gobind Singh* decided to create the Khalsa.<sup>6</sup>

The defective *Masand* system proved an important factor responsible for the creation of the Khalsa. *Guru Ram Das* had started *Masand* system for the development of Sikhism. With the passage of time, they forgot their basic ideals, became corrupt and arrogant. Instead of leading the Sikhs, they started looting them. They grew so arrogant that they started defying even the orders of *Guru Sahib*. They began to say that they were the makers of *Gurus*. Many influential *Masand* had set up their separate *Gurugaddis*. In this way, they had become big hurdles in the development of Sikhism. In order to get rid of those *Masands*, *Guru Sahib* thought of organizing the Sikhs into a new form. So a drastic remedy was needed.<sup>7</sup>

*Guru Amar Das* had made *Guruship* hereditary. It created many problems. He, who did not get *Guruship*, formed his separate sect and started opposing the *Guru*. In a bid to get *Guruship*, *Prithi Chand*, *Dhir Mal* and *Ram Rai* not only created hurdles for the Sikh *Gurus*, but also hatched conspiracies with the Mughals against them. These anti-Sikh sects tried every possible method to woo the Sikh masses into their folds. It could mislead the Sikhs. So, *Guru Gobind Singh* wanted to set up a society, which had no place for *Minas*, *Dhirmalias* and *Ramraias*.

Right from the times of *Guru Hargobind*, the Jats in a large number had started adopting Sikh religion. The Jats were great fighters by nature. They were fearless, self-respecting and brave. *Guru Gobind Singh* wanted the co-operation of such warriors to face the powerful Mughal Empire. So, he created the Khalsa.

*Guru Gobind Singh* had written in the 'Bachitar Natak' that he assumed birth for the purpose of spreading Dharma (faith), saving the saints and exterminating all tyrants. For that purpose, resort to the sword was legitimate. To realize that mission, *Guru Gobind Singh* created the Khalsa.<sup>7</sup>

On the day of Baisakhi on 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1699 A.D., *Guru Gobind Singh* held a congregation at Kesgarh, Sri Anandpur Sahib. 80000 Sikhs attended the congregation. When all the people sat down, *Guru* appeared on the stage, with his sword unsheathed and he asked that was there any Sikh who would sacrifice his life for Dharma? His words numbed the audience. When *Guru Sahib* repeated his call for the third time, *Bhai Daya Ram* offered himself for sacrifice. *Guru* took him to a nearby tent. *Guru* made *Bhai Daya Ram* sit there and returned with his sword dripping with the blood. *Guru* demanded another head. That time *Bhai Dharam Das* stood up.<sup>9</sup> The process was repeated three more times. In order to comply with *Guru's* desire, *Bhai Mohakam Chand*, *Bai Sahib Chand* and *Bhai Himmat Rai* presented themselves for sacrifice. What *Guru Gobind Singh* had done with them in the tent is better known to him. In that way, *Guru Gobind Singh* selected the 'Panj Payaras', the five beloveds.<sup>10</sup> *Guru Sahib* gave the nectar of Immortality (Khande Ka Pahul) to the five followers and then begged himself to be baptized by them. For this reason, *Guru Gobind Singh* is also called Aape Gur Chela. In this way, *Guru Gobind Singh* laid the foundation of the Khalsa.

*Guru Gobind Singh* laid down certain principles for the Khalsa. It was obligatory for every Khalsa to obey those principles. The following were the main principles. For every person who wishes to join the *Khalsa Panth*, it is essential to drink the nectar of immortality (Sikh baptism).

Every Khalsa man will use 'Singh' as suffix with his name and Khalsa woman 'Kaur' with her name. Every Khalsa will worship only one God and no other God or Goddess. Every Khalsa will wear the five emblems i.e. Kes (hair), Kangha (comb), Kara (iron bangle), Kachha (underwear) and *Kirpan* (sword). Every Khalsa will sacrifice his all for the protection of his Dharma and country. Every Khalsa will make up at dawn, take a bath and recite Gurbani. Every Khalsa will earn his livelihood by the sweat of his brow and donate 1/10<sup>th</sup> of his earnings for the spread of Dharma. Every Khalsa will wear weapons and be ready to fight for righteous causes.<sup>11</sup> The Khalsa while meeting each other will hail, 'Wahe *Guru Ji Ka Khalsa, Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh.*' No Khalsa will smoke, make use of intoxicants and have extra-marital relations. No Khalsa will believe in caste system and think terms of high and low.

The creation of the Khalsa is considered to be an important event in the Sikh history. It was a turning point not only in the history of Punjab, but also in the history of India. In fact, the creation of the Khalsa had far-reaching consequences. *Guru Nanak Dev* laid the foundation of Sikh Panth. From *Guru Angad Sahib* to *Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib*, all the Sikh *Gurus* made invaluable contribution to the development and organization of Sikhism. *Guru Gobind Singh* accomplished the task initiated by *Guru Nanak Dev* by creating the Khalsa in 1699 A.D. With the establishment of the Khalsa, there was an appreciable increase in the number of the Sikhs. *Guru Gobind Singh* not only gave *Khande-da-Pahul* (Nectar of Immortality) to a large number of Sikhs, but authorized any five 'payara' to admit any person into the number of the Khalsa after giving him *Khande-da-Pahul*.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, the number of the Khalsa increased day by day. Its fame, too, spread far and wide. By creating the Khalsa, *Guru Gobind Singh* laid the foundation of an ideal society. He established ideal moral standards for everyone.<sup>13</sup> He advised to practice truth, to live by honest means, to abstain from covetousness, to avoid immoral association with women, to act according to the *Guru Granth Sahib*, to share the same kitchen, to help fellowmen in trouble and not to take wine and other intoxicants. Members of the Khalsa brotherhood were to consider their previous castes erased and deem themselves brothers belonging to one family.

The creation of the Khalsa brought a remarkable transformation of Sikh society.<sup>14</sup> After *Guru Hargobind Sahib*, the *Masand* system was afflicted with many evils. The *Masand* had become selfish and corrupt to the core. Besides the *Masand*, *Mina*, *Dhirmalia* and *Ramraia* also made every possible effort to mislead the Sikhs. So, When *Guru Gobind Singh* created the Khalsa, he gave them no place in it. *Guru* enjoined on the Sikhs to have no concern with them. With the creation of the Khalsa, a tremendous change was effected in the whole tone of national character. Even those people, who had been considered as dregs of humanity were changed, as if by magic.<sup>15</sup>

The sweepers, barbers, confectioners, who had never touched the sword and whose generations had lived as graving slaves of the so called higher classes, became under the stimulating leadership of *Guru Gobind*

Singh, doughty warriors, who never shrank from and who were ready to rush into the jaws of death at the bidding of their *Guru*.

As a result of the creation of the Khalsa, the downtrodden people were uplifted. Prior to this, the 'shudras' and the people of other low castes were looked down upon and were treated badly. So the Indian society had become sapless from within.<sup>16</sup> By admitting the people of low castes into the *Khalsa Panth*, *Guru Gobind Singh* gave them equal status with the high castes. It was really a very radical step. This infused a new spirit among the people of low castes. They played a vital role in the battles fought against the Mughals and the Afghans under the command of *Guru Gobind Singh* and other Sikh leaders.

By creating the Khalsa, *Guru Gobind Singh* founded an independent nation. It was essential for every Khalsa to wear five emblems- 'Kes', 'Kangha', 'Kachha', 'Kara' and 'Kirpan'. It was made compulsory for every male Khalsa to use 'Singh' and for women to use 'Kaur' with her name. While meeting they hailed each other, 'Wahe *Guru Ji Ka Khalsa*, Wahe *Guru Ji Ki Fateh*'.

In this way, the Sikhs assumed a completely independent identity from Hinduism. With the creation of Khalsa, the spirit of democracy was strengthened among the Sikhs. In 1699 A.D. when *Guru Gobind Singh* created the Khalsa, he made the five beloved ones drink the Nectar of Immortality (Khande-da-Pahul). Afterwards *Guru Gobind Singh* requested these beloved ones to give him the Nectar of Immortality. To do so was a radical step on the part of *Guru Sahib*. Till now no founder of any religion had told his disciples to do so.<sup>17</sup>

*Guru Gobind Singh* declared that any five Khalsa assembled at a place could give the Nectar of Immortality to Sikhs and admit them into the Khalsa fold. Besides, this decision of theirs should be reckoned as the command of the *Guru*. By accepting the decision of the five beloved ones, *Guru Sahib* had agreed to leave the fortress of Chamkaur.<sup>18</sup> Thus, *Guru Gobind Singh* gave a new direction to the Indian society, by creating the Khalsa, *Guru Gobind Singh* infused a spirit of unique bravery and fearlessness among the Sikhs.

The bravery and courage with which the Sikhs resisted the Mughals and the Afghans is a matchless example in history. They made innumerable sacrifices, but did not falter in their Dharma. At last the Sikhs' dream came true and they succeeded in establishing their independent Misl in Punjab. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Maharaja Ranjit Singh succeeded in establishing an independent Sikh state. It was the result of indefatigable efforts of the Khalsa.<sup>19</sup>

The creation of the Khalsa is justly regarded as *Guru Gobind Singh's* greatest achievement. *Khalsa Panth* meaning the worldwide community of Khalsa or Sikhs generally. It is a name given to the religious structure and the community that manages the affairs of the global Khalsa community. "Khalsa" refers to the entire group of people who have taken an active decision to follow the way of life laid down by *Guru Gobind Singh*, the tenth Sikh *Guru*; it is the way of the life managed by the Khalsa community, who are self-managed through their democratic and collective wishes.<sup>20</sup> Since Baisakhi 1699, when the Khalsa was first forged, this community has existed as a distinct group.

Completely involved in their own local societies but also aware of its social and spiritual responsibility as stipulated by the tenth master. Unlike, other societies, this group did not lay claim to territory or land and property, even when they had rightfully defeated their aggressive opponents. The Panth's aim is the same as that of Sikhi

in general and one is just the distillation of the other. The Panth has always existed as a community within other social groups. So, you have had panthic members living as Khalsa in locations away from Punjab where the Khalsa was originally created. Today, you will find the Khalsa located in almost all the major countries of the world; living in harmony with their local societies but always aware of the underlying requirements of their spiritual masters.<sup>21</sup>

The '*Khalsa Panth*' means, as does *Guru Nanak's* earlier term the Nirmal Panth, the way of the pure or the holy. It is the way of pure spirituality, unadulterated with ritualism and free from the clutches of priests. The term Khalsa has another connotation also. In the revenue records in India during Mughal rule, this term signified crown lands, administered by the emperor himself without the mediation of Jagirdars.<sup>22</sup> Translated, the term *Guru ka*

Khalsa means the *Guru's* very own, un-mediated by *Masand* (men who were appointed by the Sikh *Gurus* whose duties were to spread the teachings of the *Guru* and collect the *dasvand* that all Sikhs rendered to the *Guru* to aid in furthering the Sikh Religion which covered among other things.

The construction of *Gurudwaras*, cities, tanks and the maintenance of a Sikh Risaldarior military force, etc. By the time of *Guru Gobind Singh*, the old saying "power corrupts" had begun to be, all too applicable to the *Masand* who had, more often than not, begun to misuse the Sikh communal religious funds for their own purposes. Putting an end to the practice of appointing *Masand*, *Guru Gobind Singh* decided that the Sikh *Sangat* would work with the *Guru* directly without any middlemen.<sup>23</sup>

The term Khalsa acquired a more specific connotation after he introduced *Khande-dipahul* initiation with a double-edged sword in 1699. Since then, all those thus initiated have been collectively designated as the *Khalsa Panth*. As the last living human *Guru* of the Sikhs.

*Guru Gobind Singh* installed the *Guru Granth Sahib* as the 11<sup>th</sup> *Guru* of the Sikhs. He handed the governance of the *Khalsa Panth* over to its own members to be shaped and managed under the abiding guidance of *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Since then, the Khalsa has evolved into a kind of spiritual commonwealth-a spiritually welded collectivity which awakens in each individual a spontaneous discipline as well as a disciplined spontaneity. The civilizations of the world have seen many contrasting ways of setting ideals of life. One is the way of hedonism, or pursuit of sensual pleasure advocated by those who consider this life as a sole opportunity for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

This outlook is epitomized in the famous lines of Babur, "Enjoy life's pleasures to the full, for this world is never going to be again for you" or, by the apparently hedonistic meaning of

Omar Khayyam's verse which has been translated by Fitzgerald as Dreaming, when dawn's left-hand was in the sky, I heard a voice within the tavern cry, awake my little ones, and fill the cup, before life's liquor in it's cup be dry. This is the materialist way, looking for material gain, amassing wealth and power, lavishly indulging in sensuality.<sup>24</sup> It is the way of pravirti or involvement in the world. Contrasted with this has been the way which considers the world an illusion and its materiality a mirage. Hence, it advocated withdrawal from the outside and seeking the joy of self-realization within. Even when one chooses to withdraw from the world and concentrates

within, the world may still interfere with one's spiritual pursuit. In that case, one has two choices. One may run away from the world, i.e. renounce the world. It is the way of *nivirti* or renunciation. Alternatively, one may choose to become so strong that no one dare interfere with his spiritual pursuits.<sup>25</sup>

The Khalsa outlook of spirituality considers both involvement (*pravirti*) and renunciation (*nivirti*) as extremes and advocates a middle path. The *Guru's* word affirms. Involvement as well as renunciation are stubborn obstinacies.<sup>26</sup> The middle path is continuing to be in the world but staying there dis-attached, just like the lotus flower which grows out of mud unblemished by it.

The Khalsa point of view, since it does not approve of renunciation, prescribes valour as a safeguard against interference from others. However, this has to be disciplined valour, compassionate valour and an altruist valour; not one which is self-willed and tyrannical. In this context, the *Guru* ordains: Two Pillars of the Khalsa Spirituality.<sup>27</sup>

The twin pillars of the Khalsa spirituality are *Naam*, the vehicle of inner spirituality and *Kirpan*, the symbol of outer spirituality or valour. It would be useful to consider these two in some detail. *Naam* is the foundation stone of Sikh spirituality. *Naam* has usually been translated as Name, implying God's Name. However, Name does not fully convey what *Naam* comprehensively means as a metaphysical term in Sikh theology. It is very much more than God's Name, though it is God's Name as well. *Naam* and egoism are mutually opposed - the two cannot exist together. *Naam* sustains all living beings. Here *Naam* stands for Divine creativity, coming as does between God Himself and His creation. Let us now consider what *Naam Japna* is, which is a prescribed spiritual praxis. *Japna* is usually translated as muttering. But *Naam Japna* is not mechanical muttering of God's Name. *Guru Amar Das* says, "There are thousands upon thousands of *Naam*-mutterers who get nowhere,"<sup>28</sup>

They seem to be looking for peace. But what kind of peace do they get, if they get at all? It would be dead peace, not living peace. Living peace is characterized by creativity". It is not just getting absorbed in the formless, unknown, infinite. It is making the void alive with myriad dynamic forces and forms. Mechanical muttering may lead to mental abstraction in which all dualities and all opposites come to an end. It would be uncreative peace - a spiritual inanity. *Naam Japna* in the Khalsa terminology is a process creatively inspired. It is dwelling in Him with one's entire Being. It is practicing the presence of God. It is feeling Him around - He who sustains us, supports us, provides for us, takes care of us, loves us, showers his gifts on us unasked, and having given never repents. It is remembering him with loving gratitude is *Naam Simrin* or *Naam Japna*. It is to be aware of God at our back. It is remembering Him as we remember our absent friends - with love and expectation. It is inebriation with love - madly inspired. The key factor in *Naam japna* is *dhyān* (focused attentively). In the liturgical prayer (*Ardas*) the *ardasia*, time and again, invites the congregation to focus their attention and call on "Wahe *Guru!*" Sustained attention is meditation.

*Naam Japna* or *Naam Simran*, then, is the specific Khalsa way of meditation. *Naam* is the *Guru's* gift, a special gift to his disciples. Everyone utters the *Naam* by his lips. The *Guru* is essential for *Naam*. But the *Guru* need to be a corporeal *Guru*. The real *Guru* is his precept or *bani*. The embodiment of the *Guru's* spiritual precepts is *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* which, therefore is the source of *Naam*.

Meditation of *Naam* leads to a spiritual implosion, when torrential cascades of energy are released within. This energy may appear as nad (sound) or joti (light). Sound and light are interchangeable modes of energy -as has lately been demonstrated by the scientific experiments on sonoluminescence. In this slok, the chirping of the sparrow signifies the nad and breaking of the dawn signifies jyoti. Those who meditate on *Naam* are familiar with these experiences as also with unrolling of a myriad streams of unstuck musicality. *Kirpan* (the sword), also called Sri Sahib in the Khalsa parlance, is the second symbol of the Khalsa spirituality. It is a symbol of divine dynamism. God is active all the time, everywhere, some times think, God is not a name, but a verb. He is superdynamic and Sri Sahib is the symbol of his super dynamism.

While *Naam* represents the ingoing side of nature, Sri Sahib represents its outgoing side. It stands for the Divine Power the Divine Sword. *Guru Gobind Singh* leaves no doubt that it is the Divine Sword when he describes it in the following terms : Although Jesus Christ is believed to be the great pacifist, yet he said; "think not that I came to send peace on Earth. I came not to send peace but a sword." While "peace" is the stilling, calm, negative condition, the "sword" is the outgoing or positive condition. All that is evil or obstructive has to be destroyed before reconstruction is possible. Here, like *Naam*, the double-edged sword (Khanda) also represents Divine Creativity.

The sword of the Khalsa is then the Divine Sword which destroys evil. It is not unsheathed in anger, or out of vengeance. It rises only out of compassion. It does not take away life, but protects it. It does not slaughter, it only saves. One is reminded here of a fascinating story from the history of the Khalsa.

Baba Sahib Singh Bedi was a respected leader of the Khalsa so highly respected that the natural choice to appoint Maharaja Ranjit Singh to kingship fell on him. The story, however, pertains to his earlier days when Baba had been proclaimed as a rebel by the Mughal rulers and he was wanted dead or alive. That was the time when he had taken sojourn in a forest. An army officer, Din Mohammed by name, got scent of him and started searching the forest. Finally he found Baba but most unexpectedly was struck by Baba's extraordinary compassion, his God-fearing fearlessness and his exemplary hospitality. So, instead of killing him or taking him prisoner, he respectfully took leave of him. Hardly had he proceeded a few steps after leaving Baba's cottage that he noticed three Pathans dragging a young girl towards their waiting camels.

It did not take him time to recognize the girl as the deaf and dumb young lady who was living with Baba and had been his co-host the previous night. He had learnt from Baba that this handicapped girl when only an infant was deserted by her parents, and abandoned in the forest. Baba found her and in compassion brought her up. Seeing her in distress, the officer pounced upon the Pathans but being out numbered, he was overpowered. However, hearing the noise, the Baba came out and fell upon the Pathans. He seized one of them he but the other two fled scared. Baba threw the seized Pathan on the ground and mounting on his chest said that he had attempted on the modesty of an innocent girl. His punishment could not be anything short of death, so he be prepared. The Pathan, upon this, employing the foulest language not only hurled coarse abuses on Baba but also spat on his face and appealed that he could do he like. Baba got down from his chest and said, he would surely had killed him, but now he spared him, lest it be construed that he killed him out of vengeance after that insult. If Din Mohammed had to square any accounts with you, he left him into his hands.

So, in addition to *Naam* as the prime symbol of Divinity for the Khalsa, a complementary symbol of the Divine is also *Kirpan* or *Siri Sahib* which has been referred to as "all-steel", "all-time" and "supreme mortality". The fusion of *Naam* and *Kirpan* is witnessed in the initiation ceremony of the Khalsa called *Khande-di-Pahul* designed by *Guru Gobind Singh*, this ceremony was first introduced on the *Vaisakhi* day of 1699. In a steel bowl he stirred sweetened water with a double-edged sword while reciting *gurbani*.

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