

Guru Govind Singh

*By Chanan Singh BA**

Aurengzeb is on the Moghal throne at Delhi. He embarks on his campaign of forcing Islam on each and every 'kafir' under his sway. Hundreds and thousands of poor, helpless Hindus are daily converted at the point of the sword. Some Brahmins of Kashmir seeing no hope of saving their sacred thread resort to Guru Teg Bahadur, the ninth reincarnation of Guru Nanak's soul and implore him to come to their rescue. The woebegone looks and the gruesome tales of their sufferings at the hands of the tyrant make the Guru gloomy. As he sits overwhelmed with gloom, his eight year old son leaps into his lap and asks the why and wherefore of his gloom. The Guru says, 'The tyranny of the oppressor is raging with ruthless velocity and its tide cannot be stemmed unless some holiest person exposes himself to his brutality and the sight of his heroic suffering in silence wakes up the dormant good self in the tyrant.' There is no person holier than you,' says the son, 'and if by sacrificing your own life, you can save the life and religion of the myriad helpless sufferers, do make this sacrifice.'

This child in whom the spirit of Guru Nanak reincarnated itself for the tenth and last time first saw the light of the day on the 22nd of December, 1666. The burden of the spiritual guidance of the followers of Guru Nanak fell on his shoulders when he was only eight years old, but he infused such a spirit in the senile minds that there was an upsurge of heroism and chivalry and the tables were turned upon the tyrant.

The Guru had, as he himself has proclaimed, been commissioned by the Supreme Power 'to uphold and propagate righteousness in every place and to seize and destroy the doers of sin and evil.' He maintained that when one's principles were at stake, force must be met with force, as it is fire which puts out fire. It is cowardice to turn your right cheek to an unrelenting tyrant when he slaps your left one.

To this end he planned to weld all his followers into democratic society fearing none but God and frightening none but the tyrant who sought to work havoc in God's garden whose beauty consists in the variegated flowers that different social patterns are. One fine morning, he arranged a big gathering to which hundreds upon thousands of his followers came. He appeared before them, with blood-shot eyes and brandishing a sword in his hand and called out, 'I want a head.' The whole congregation was frightened out of wits and vacant faces looked at one another, but there was one who said, 'My head at the feet of the Master.' He was taken to an enclosure and the Guru appeared again; this time his sword was smeared with blood and he made the same demand. The weaker minds beat violently against the sides, but yet another courageous soul came forward humbly. Out of the whole gathering there were only five who were ready to sacrifice their lives at the altar of the Guru. They were baptised by the Guru and he himself was baptised by them and thus the *Khalsa* came into being. All five of them came from different castes but they partook of *Amrit*, a holy drink prepared by the Guru, from the same bowl and thus were united into a homogeneous brotherhood to which considerations of caste, creed and colour are foreign. The Guru gave them a uniform which should distinguish them from other social patterns and rules of conduct. A person, when he is initiated into the ranks of

the Khalsa, becomes a Sikh and brother: his father is Guru Govind Singh to whom he dedicates his life. These five 'Beloveds', as they are called, spread his words among all his followers and there grew up a martial band ready to lay their lives at the behests of the Guru.

Now the Guru started his campaign for the eradication of evil. To do this he had to pit himself against the Mighty Emperor Aurangzeb who had at his disposal all resources in men and material that his vast empire could afford. Undaunted by the balance of power being against him, the Guru stood firm as a rock in the face of untold miseries that he had to face. His two elder sons, who had not yet reached their teens, fell fighting against thousands of the enemy and the younger two were arrested by the Governor of Sirhind who tried to convert them by tempting them in various ways. Nothing could make their minds toss, not even the threat of death. These two innocent children were buried alive in brickwork. The Guru suffered many reverses but with a handful of his Sikhs went on fighting against thousands of the enemy. He had to betake himself to the jungles where he walked bare-foot, slept on stones and was forlorn; at one time he was deserted by his own men, but nothing could unhinge his mind. Once his wife gave way to sorrow for the loss of their four children; Guru encouraged her by saying, 'What does it matter if we have lost four sons when we have thousands of our sons in our Sikhs.' By sacrificing his father, his sons, his own self and his all, the Guru shook the foundations of the diabolical forces. His mission was carried on by Banda Singh Bahadur, his ardent devotee, who hastened the end of the forces of darkness.

Though the Guru was for the most time engaged in war, he was most devoted to the worship of God, in whose adoration he sang paeans of glory and power. Himself a great scholar, the Guru had a great love of letters and gathered around himself a galaxy of fifty two eminent poets among whom Bhai Nand Lal was a gem of rare lustre.

Before the Guru returned to his eternal abode, he canonized the Holy Granth as the future Guru of the Sikhs. 'If you want to see me,' said the Guru to his disciples, 'see the Guru Granth Sahib, and if you want to speak to me, recite the holy verses in the Guru Granth.'

The Guru, by his example and precept, inculcated in the minds of his followers a love of devotion to the Godhead, intellectual and spiritual pursuits in times of peace and self-sacrifice in war – war fought not for self-aggrandisement or for lust of power or sway but for the eradication of evil and for the restitution of the down-trodden. The Guru has shown the deluded humanity the path which, though difficult to keep on to, leads to its native loftiness and guarantees salvation in every context of social, religious, political and cultural phenomenon in the kaleidoscopic phases of the ever-shifting drama of human life.

* Teacher (deceased) at the former Duke of Gloucester School, Nairobi, Kenya. First published in 1955 in the "Pioneer" the then monthly bulletin of the E.A. Sikh Association.