

# SIKH AND KHALSA

## ARTICLE

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### INTRODUCTION

Controlling people and killing in the name of religion and the religious wars is nothing new in human history. Looking at the history of Religion and God, what Christians have inherited today is the monotheism of the all-male God of the Trinitarians [2]. This is a mythology that is needed for an era where people compete for limited resources. This mythology suppresses sexuality and creates more violence. *The suppression of sexuality and the increase of violence bestow a survival advantage to people who must compete for limited resources.*

The second largest religion, Islam used violence to spread over the world. The history of Hindu avatars Krishna and Rama is also based in violence of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. So is the creation of **Khalsa**, the fighting force in Sikhism by the last of ten gurus against Muslim rulers.

In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, Mogul Emperor Aurungzeb's religious policy was totally against non-Muslims. Hindus and Sikhs had to pay more taxes than Muslims did. On the site of temple, he built a mosque at a great cost. All these accesses were happening around 1690. Tenth Guru of the Sikhs created the army of Khalsa in 1699 to fight against these accesses.

### CREATION OF KHALSA

Guru Gobind Rai, who became Guru Gobind Singh after the creation of Khalsa, was determined to exterminate the religious oppression of the Mughal Government. The creation of **Khalsa** was to fight against the cruelty of Muslim rulers of 17<sup>th</sup> century. A Khalsa carries a unique appearance. Neither men nor women cut their hair. The men wear full beards and wrap their long hair in turbans. A Khalsa also wears a steel bangle, a sword and unique underwear. A Khalsa also carries a small comb in the hair. The uniform of Khalsa is described by five Ks in Punjabi (*Kes, kangha, kara, Kachha, kirpan*). This uniform is centered towards readiness of Khalsa as a soldier to

### ABSTRACT

*As part of his future vision, Guru Gobind Singh, the 10<sup>th</sup> Guru ended human Guru-ship by declaring Guru Granth Sahib (GGS) as the eternal Guru for the future generation of Sikhs. The Holy Scripture **Guru Granth Sahib** is revered by the Sikh people as the ultimate truth and a guiding light to realization of God and to live a spiritual life. However, the greatest contribution of Guru Gobind Singh is the creation of **Khalsa** to fight against the cruelty of Muslim rulers of 17<sup>th</sup> century; but not Muslim people. A Khalsa carries a unique appearance. Neither men nor women cut their hair. The men wear full beards and wrap their long hair in turbans. A Khalsa also wears a steel bangle, a sword and unique underwear. A Khalsa also carries a small comb in the hair. The uniform of Khalsa is described by five Ks in Punjabi (*Kes, kangha, kara, Kachha, kirpan*). This uniform is centered towards readiness of Khalsa as a soldier to fight for the right. Sikhs do not believe in terrorism and killing of innocent and they are commonly identified as "Saint Soldiers", because they lead a pure saintly life and fight against the injustice and to defend the weak and oppressed. A Sikh may belong to Khalsa through receiving baptism or initiation (*Amrit/khande de pahul*). Therefore, **every Khalsa is a Sikh but every Sikh is not a Khalsa unless he/she receives baptism**. Baptism of the double-edged sword was voluntary for the Khalsa even in the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh. Today, the Khalsa is respected by the entire Sikh nation; however, there have never been more than 15% of the Sikhs who were or are amritdharis. Rahit (code) that covers only the Khalsa has caused divisions among the Sikh community. It is proper understanding of Guru Gobind Singh's vision to create Khalsa that can bring harmony among the Sikhs.*

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Guru Gobind Singh was not against Muslim people but the cruel government; because there is no word in his speeches and writings to prove otherwise. He was embodiment of love and affection for all. His instructions to his Sikhs were to treat everybody with courtesy and consideration. He specifically forbade Sikhs to have carnal knowledge of Muslim women. It was for these reasons that both Muslims and Hindus were attracted

towards him. Muslim Sufi saints and notable Muslim commanders, and hundreds of Muslim soldiers fought under his banner. Pir Buddhu Shah of Sadhaura, together with his sons and 700 followers fought hard in the battle of Bhangani in which Pir lost two of his sons and hundreds of disciples.

Guru says : *Kou kise ko raj na de ha; ja lai hai nij bal sit lai hai*  
(No one can have self-rule as a gift from another. It is to be seized through their own strength.)

Guru Gobind Singh in October 1708 deputed his disciple Banda Singh Bahadur to lead the Khalsa in an uprising against the Mughals. Banda Singh Bahadur first established a Sikh kingdom and then brought in the Land reforms in the form of breaking up large estates and distributing the land to peasants. He and his comrades were eventually defeated and executed, but he became an icon among the Sikhs. After a long exile, the Khalsa regrouped under Nawab Kapur Singh, who gathered local Khalsa leaders and created *Dal Khalsa*, a coalition army. The Dal Khalsa fought against the Mughals and the Afghans, eventually resulting in the establishment of a number of small republics called *Misls* (autonomous confederacies) and later in the formation of the Sikh Empire.

After the fall of Mughal Empire and the later establishment of the Sikh Empire in Punjab, the Khalsa was converted into a strong, multi-religious and multinational fighting force, modernized according to European principles. The Khalsa Army had a huge role in the expansion of the empire, led by great generals like Maharaja Ranjit Singh himself, Diwan Chand and Hari Singh Nalwa. It successfully defeated all its adversaries, including Afghan tribal and army, Hill Chiefs, Misl-dars, Chinese, Tibetan and Gurkhas. By the time of death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839, the whole army of Sikh Empire was assessed at 120,000 men, with 250 artillery pieces.

The official name of the state (Sikh

Empire) of Sikhs was "*Sarkar-i-Khalsa*": Government of the Khalsa. The boundaries of this state stretched from Tibet to Afghanistan and from Kashmir to Sutlej in the south and included regions of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Kashmir, Ladakh, etc. The "*Sarkar-i-Khalsa*" was dissolved during two wars fought against the British between 1846 and 1849.

#### KHALSA TODAY

Today, the Khalsa is respected by the entire Sikh nation; however, not all Sikhs are *Amritdharis* [1]. There have never been more than 15% of the Sikhs who were or are *amritdharis*. That is over twenty million are *non-amritdharis* and about three million are *amritdharis*.

McLeod's study and analysis ( "*Sikhs of the Khalsa: A history of the Khalsa Rahit*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2003, p 282) refers to some of the controversies that are currently taking place in the *panth* [5]. He makes a distinction between a Sikh and a Khalsa. All Sikhs are not Khalsa, but all Khalsa are Sikhs. *Rahit* covers only the Khalsa and to be a Sikh of the Khalsa one must observe it. According to McLeod, only a small portion, about 15 % of the *Panth* strictly follow *Rahit* or are *Amritdharis*.

J.S. Grewal (in "*The Khalsa & the Punjab: Studies in Sikh History, to the 19th Century*" edited by Himadri Banerjee; Tulika Books; New Delhi, 2002; pages xxxiii+192) gives the reasons for the formation of the Khalsa [3]. He effectively makes a distinction between the Sikh Panth and the Khalsa. He notes "Baptism of the double-edged sword was voluntary for the Khalsa even in the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh. He goes on to say: If the Guru had wanted all Sikhs to be part of the Khalsa he would have made initiation/ baptism (*khande-de-pahul*) mandatory for all?"

The issue of Khalsa code of conduct has led to several controversies. In the early 1950s, a serious split occurred in the

Canadian Sikh community, when the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver, Canada elected a clean-shaven Sikh to serve on its management committee [4]. Although most of the early Sikh immigrants to Canada were non-Khalsa, and a majority of the members of the society were clean-shaven non-Khalsa Sikhs, a faction objected to the election of a non-Khalsa to the management committee. The factions in Vancouver and Victoria broke away from the Khalsa Diwan Society, and established their own gurdwara society called Akali Singh.[4]

In the United Kingdom, there have been tensions between the Khalsa Sikhs and the non-Khalsa Sikhs. Many Sikhs in Britain have insisted on their right of not conforming to the Khalsa norms, while maintaining that they are truly Sikh. On the other hand, some of the Khalsa Sikhs think of the non-Khalsa Sikhs as having abandoned the Sikh faith altogether. The above examples are not confined to Canada and UK only but are happening almost everywhere. Are we following Guru Sahib who loved the entire humanity?

We are fighting among ourselves and our Guru loved entire humanity including Muslims while fighting against cruelty of Muslim rulers. We should note that although Guru Gobind Singh offered the highest honor to Khalsa, he did not expect every Sikh to become Khalsa. For example, one of his most favorite poets Bhai Nand Lal and more than half of his other poets did not become Khalsa. It was true with the family members of Guru Sahib. Therefore, Dashmesh Pita 10<sup>th</sup> Guru considered all of them Sikhs, irrespective of initiated or uninitiated. This is a good lesson to avoid fighting over *amritdhari* and *non-amritdhari* issues. We should love and respect each other [1].

In the universal spirit of Sikhism, let us not fight over who is Sikh and who is not but endorse the definition of a Sikh as a "person who believe in the Guru Granth Sahib, believe in the Ten Gurus, and have no other religion." Let the Sikhs all over the world (in the West and East including

SGPC) consider it for universal adoption.

Moreover, when we look at Guru Nanak's philosophy incorporated in Guru Granth Sahib (GGS) declared as eternal Guru by Guru Gobind Singh--Sikhism belongs to every human being and it carries a universal message in the true sense (*sarbat da bhala*). However, most of the Sikh gurdwara's are ignoring the spiritual nature of our founding Guru's message in Gurbani. Many times Sikhs spend time fighting, for example, over physical appearance--either forcing our views on others and cursing them or defending us from those who are forcing their views. I meet *Amritdhari* Sikhs and those who are *non-Amritdhari*. Most of us will agree that there will always be *Amritdhari* and *non-Amritdhari* Sikhs and both can either sit together in gurdwaras or divide our community into separate gurdwaras. It is only the understanding of gurbani and its message that can practically improve our everyday living, and can keep us together within our own community and with the rest of the world.

### CONCLUSIONS

Sometimes militancy is a necessity and it played very significant part in Sikh history. Sikhs stand out for their bravery. However, our image as militant Nihangs has dominated our religion and is being exploited. We have not been able to erase this militant image, and create a vision of future human society with universal human values.

We have to properly understand our last living Guru Gobind Singh. He asked us to follow Guru Granth Sahib and its teachings (*guru granth ji maneo, pargat guran kee deh; jo prabh ko mil voh hai, khoj shabad mein ley*. meaning: Guru Granth is our guru and it represents

philosophy (body) of all the gurus; only the sabd will connect us with *akaal purkh*). Guru Granth Sahib (GGS) is our eternal guru and the only guru to guide us, as suggested by the very last living guru, Gobind Singh. We have, however, failed to convince Sikh masses on accepting the GGS as our only guiding light? We hear instances of going so far as to install *Dasam Granth* (DG) equal to GGS and justify and fight over it whether 10<sup>th</sup> guru sahib wrote it or his poets wrote it. Irrespective of who wrote it, Dashmesh pita never elevated his own writing to the status of gurbani as written and authenticated in Guru Granth Sahib. Therefore, it is wrong to consider DG equal to GGS and should end internal fighting over such issues.

We should recognize *Rahitnamas* and Singh Sabha declaration as documents that served well in the times these were written, and not follow blindly as guru's words and argue over their outdated rituals. For example, our founding Guru Nanak says about woman:

ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ॥;

*so ki-o mandaa akhee-ai jit jameh raajaan*. AGGS, p 473; meaning: Why call woman bad? From her, kings are born; whereas, Bhai Chaupa Singh in rahitnama says: *istri kay jamay ka viswas nahi karna*; meaning: Never trust a woman.

As mentioned earlier, we have to put in proper perspective the concept of *Khalsa* and *khande de pahul* that has become a bone of contention. We should always keep in mind that every Khalsa is a Sikh but every Sikh is not a Khalsa unless he/she receives baptism. Encourage those who are ready to take *Khande de pahul* to join the ranks of Khalsa, but respect each other as equal Sikhs in all respects inside or outside the gurdwara [1].

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