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Volume 4

Max Arthur Macauliffe

Excerpt

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LIFE OF GURU HAR GOBIND,¹ THE SIXTH GURU

CHAPTER I

Ille ego qui quondam gracili modulatus avena
Carmen

. nunc horrentia Martis

Arma virosque ² cano.

Lo! I the man whose muse whilom did mask,
As time her taught, in lowly shepherd's weeds,
Am now enforced—a far unfitter task—
For trumpets stern to change mine oaten reeds.

SPENSER.

THE early life of Guru Har Gobind has already been given in the life of his father Guru Arjan. On

¹ Besides the life of the sixth Guru by Bhāi Santokh Singh, mentioned in the Introduction, there is another work called *Gur Bilās* on the same subject. The name of the author is not given. In the preface to it it is stated that Bhāi Mani Singh went to Nankāna. The rāgis were singing Gur Dās's compositions. When they came to the following—There were five cups, five priests, the great priest the sixth Guru sat on his throne—one Bhagat Singh, a devout Sikh of the locality, called upon Mani Singh to give an account of Guru Har Gobind, the sixth Guru. Mani Singh replied, 'I will relate to thee what Guru Gobind Singh told Bhāi Daya Singh, and what the latter communicated to me.' One Dharm Singh was present, and heard Mani Singh's narrative. He gave its details to the author of the *Gur Bilās*, whom he had previously baptized. The author of the work states that he completed it in Sambat 1775 (A.D. 1718). Sardār Kāhn Singh of Nābha, however, gives it as his opinion that the work was compiled by Bhāi Gurumukh Singh and Bhāi Darbāra Singh, a priest and a chorister respectively of the Sikh temple at Amritsar, and that they began their literary labour in the reign of Mahārāja Ranjit Singh and finished it in the reign of Mahārāja Sher Singh.

We are also indebted for several details of the life of Guru Har Gobind to a manuscript life of that Guru in the Panjābi language, and also to the Hindi work, *Itihās Guru Khālsa*, of Sādhu Gobind Singh of Banāras.

² Virgil had only one hero; we have several.

ascertaining his father's death, he caused the Granth Sahib to be read, and employed Bhai Budha for the purpose. The musicians of the temple sang the Gurus' hymns to the accompaniment of their instruments. The singing and the reading of the Granth Sahib lasted for ten days.

When the final rites were ended, Bhai Budha clothed Guru Har Gobind in new raiment, and placed before him a seli—a woollen cord worn as a necklace or twisted round the head by the former Gurus—and a turban, as appurtenances of his calling. Guru Har Gobind ordered that the seli should be placed in the treasury, apparently because it was not suited to the altered political condition of the Sikhs. He then addressed Bhai Budha, 'My endeavours shall be to fulfil thy prophecy. My seli shall be a sword-belt, and I shall wear my turban with a royal aigrette.' He then sent for his arms, and arrayed himself in martial style so that, as the Sikh chronicler states, his splendour shone like the sun.

Guru Har Gobind then, according to the custom usual on such occasions, summoned all his Sikhs, and invited the principal inhabitants of Amritsar to a banquet. He caused a large quantity of sacred food to be made and brought into the temple for the entertainment of his guests. While Bhai Budha read the Granth Sahib in the middle of a well-ordered assembly Gur Das stood and waved a gorgeous chauri over the sacred volume. When the reading was ended, all the assembly reverently bowed their heads. The singers again began to sing the Gurus' hymns. The Sadd was intoned and a solemn prayer offered. The Guru reaffirmed instructions for the guidance of future generations of Sikhs in the performance of obsequies:—

'When a Sikh dieth, let not the obsequies of Hindus be performed for him. Let sacred food be prepared and distributed, let the Granth Sahib be intoned and a solemn prayer offered, as I caused to be done on'

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hearing of my father's death. That is the way to prepare for the deceased a passage to Sach Khand.'

Only one body of men among his followers were dissatisfied at his accession. The masands, who used to collect offerings and tithes from the Sikhs, had become very corrupt and dishonest, and they now trembled for their misdeeds. They represented to the Guru's mother, 'It is the reign of the Mughals. We have nobody of mature age to guide and protect us. The Guru is yet a boy. Chandu is still an enemy. The Guru girdeth on his arms, but for faqirs to lord it over men is a course that involveth peril. The preceding five Gurus never handled arms. If Jahangir hear of our Guru's doings he will be angry; and where shall we hide ourselves?' The Guru's mother replied, 'Have no anxiety. Guru Nanak's hand is on my son's head. The Guru ever liveth. Bhai Budha's words, that Har Gobind shall be a temporal as well as spiritual ruler and shall wield two swords, are about to be fulfilled.' Notwithstanding, however, the courageous face she showed the masands, she remonstrated with the young Guru. 'My son, we have no treasure, no state revenue, no landed property, no army. If thou walk in the way of thy father and grandfather, thou shalt be happy.' The Guru replied in the words of Guru Arjan:—

The Lord who is the Searcher of all hearts
Is my guardian.¹

'Have no anxiety whatever for me, everything shall be according to the will of God.'

The Guru then issued an encyclical letter to the masands to the effect that he would be pleased with those who brought offerings of arms and horses instead of money. On Monday, the fifth day of the light half of Har, Sambat 1663, he laid the foundation of the Takht Akal Bunga. When it was built

¹ Bhairo.

of solid masonry, he took his seat on it. It is the corridor of the golden temple whereon the Akalis now sit and the arms of the Gurus are preserved.

Bhai Budha, too, on seeing the young Guru in military harness mildly remonstrated with him. The Guru replied, 'It is through thine intercession I obtained birth; and it is in fulfilment of thy blessing I wear two swords as emblems of spiritual and temporal authority. In the Guru's house religion and worldly enjoyment shall be combined—the caldron to supply the poor and needy and the scimitar to smite oppressors.'

Several warriors and wrestlers hearing of the Guru's fame came to him for service. He enrolled as his body-guard fifty-two heroes who burned for the fray. This formed the nucleus of his future army. Five hundred youths then came to him for enlistment from the Manjha (the country between the Ravi and the Bias), the Doab (the country between the Bias and the Satluj), and the Malwa¹ countries. These men told the Guru that they had no offerings to make him but their lives; for pay they only required instruction in his religion; and they professed themselves ready to die in his service. The Guru gave them each a horse and weapons of war, and gladly enlisted them in his army. He made Bidhi Chand, Pirana, Jetha, Paira, and Langaha, each a captain of a troop of one hundred horse.

After this several men out of employ and without a taste for manual labour flocked to the Guru's standard. People began to wonder how he could continue to maintain such an army. The Guru quoted from Guru Arjan:—

God putteth their food even before the insects which He created in rocks and stones;

¹ Mālwa comprises that portion of the Panjāb formed by the Patiāla, Nābha, Jīnd, and Farīdkot feudatory states, and the British districts of Firozpur and Ludhiāna.

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He provideth every one with his daily food ; why, O man,
art thou afraid ? ¹

The Guru by quoting such passages and by his own helpfulness and force of character removed men's fears. In a short time, besides such as required regular pay, hordes gathered round him, who were satisfied with two meals a day and a new uniform every half-year.

Guru Har Gobind appears to have been the first Guru who systematically turned his attention to the chase. He rose before day, bathed, dressed himself in full armour, and then went to the Har Mandar—God's temple—to worship. There he heard the Japji and the Asa ki War recited. He then preached to his Sikhs. After his sermon the Anand of Guru Amar Das and a concluding prayer were read. Upon this all repaired to breakfast which was distributed indiscriminately to the Guru's troops and followers as they sat in rows for the purpose. The Guru was in the habit of afterwards taking rest for about an hour and then preparing for the chase. Accompanied by an army of forest beaters, hounds, tame leopards, and hawks of every variety, he used to sally forth and traverse long distances.

Once a sadhu, or Hindu holy man, on seeing the Guru's proceedings expressed contempt for him as a destroyer of life. The Guru quoted in justification Guru Nanak's verses on the subject of flesh. Upon this the holy man repented of his censure.

Late in the afternoon the Guru used to sit on his throne, and give audience to his visitors and followers. Minstrels sang the Guru's hymns and at twilight the 'Sodar' was read. Then all stood up and with clasped hands, offered a prayer to the Almighty. At the conclusion of the service musical instruments of many sorts were played. The congregation then

¹ Gūjari.

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bowed to the Guru, and all adjourned for their evening repast. A sacred concert was afterwards held in which hymns were sung in the Kalian and Kanra measures. Next followed the minstrel Abdulla's martial songs to inspire the Sikhs with love of heroic deeds and dispel feelings unworthy of warriors.

The Sohila was then read, after which the Guru retired to his private apartment. Before going to sleep he used to place his head on his mother's feet in respectful salutation and receive her blessing and embrace.

The Guru was fond of reciting Guru Nanak's compositions to his Sikhs, particularly the following:—

Thou art the Creator, the Arranger,
Who having Thyself created *the world* recognized *it as good*.

Thou art Thyself the True Guru, Thyself the Worshipper,
Thyself the Creator of the universe.

Thou art near, not distant.

They who know this under the Guru's instruction are perfect.

There is profit in associating with them day and night ;
this is the advantage of association with the Guru.

In every age, O God, Thy saints are good.

Their tongues are flavoured by singing Thy praises.

They utter Thy praises, disregard misery and poverty,
and have no apprehension from others.

They remain awake and are never seen asleep.

By serving up truth they save their associates and families.

They have not the filth of sin ; they are spotless ; they abide in devotion and love.

Ye men of God, understand the true Guru's word.

This youth is but for a moment ;¹ the body *groweth* old.

O mortal, thou shalt die to-day or to-morrow ; repeat God's name and meditate on it in thy heart.

¹ *Sās*. Literally—for a breath.

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O mortal, eschew falsehood and flattery.¹
 Death flayeth and killeth the false one :²
 The apostate suffereth for his falsehood and pride ; he
 is tormented in both worlds.
 Renounce slander and envy of others.
 Man is ruined by perpetual reading, and to him peace
 cometh not.
 In the company of the saints praise the Name, and the
 Supreme God will be your Helper.
 Renounce the sins of lust and wrath ;
 Renounce works of pride and covetousness.
 Enter the true Guru's protection, and you shall be saved ;
 thus shall you cross the terrible ocean, my brethren.
 In front is a noisome river and a poisonous whirlpool of fire.
 There will be no one to assist, the soul must go alone.
 The fiery flood formeth hissing waves : through perverse-
 ness man falleth and is burned therein.³

CHAPTER II

According to the Sikh chronicler the Guru rained instruction like clouds in Sawan, and the Sikhs flourished under it like thirsty rice-fields. All the Sikhs revived like vegetables in season, but Chandu's heart shrivelled up like the poisonous akk and the camel-thorn in the monsoons. Chandu's daughter was still unwedded. It is written in the ' Chanakya Niti ' :⁴—

Sleep cometh not at nights to three persons—

¹ *Kabāra*. From this word comes the well-known *kabāri*, a man who sells to Anglo-Indians furniture purchased at auctions.

² *Uchhāhāra*. Believed to be the Panjābi *ucherna*. Others suppose it to be *uchhalna*, to leap, and translate the line—Death will make a bound and destroy the false one.

³ Māru Solha.

⁴ Chanakya was a Brahman friend of the monarch Chandragupta. He wrote a work on polity and ethics, and has been called the Indian Machiavelli. His *Niti* was translated under the order of Guru Gobind Singh into elegant Hindi verse by Sainapati.

A debtor, the father of a maid, and a man in fear of an enemy.

Chandu had to expiate the crime of having been instrumental in killing Guru Arjan ; his daughter remained unwedded, and he feared the growing military power of Guru Har Gobind. Chandu's aspirations, however, like those of a poor man remained unfulfilled. One day he was vaunting in his wife's presence, that if she said but the word, he would send Guru Har Gobind to his father. She replied, ' My lord, a tree beareth fruit at the proper season ; I fear that the thorns which we formerly planted shall now prick us. I hear that the young Guru hath vowed to avenge his father. May God preserve us ! There is no reliance on Emperors. In a moment they become as if they had never known one. When we extended our enmity to Guru Arjan, what return did we obtain for it ? Our daughter is still unwedded, and thou art in fear. Wherefore let us make peace with the Guru.'

Upon this Chandu wrote to the Guru, ' My daughter is virtuous. Make her thy slave. Thou art Guru, I am the Emperor's minister. A man's dignity increaseth by an alliance with the exalted. If thou listen to my words, it shall be greatly to thine advantage. At present thou understandest not, but thou shalt hereafter. On a former occasion thy father's Sikhs called me a dog. It did them no harm ; it was thy father who suffered for it. I have now forgotten my former enmity ; but if thou listen not to my words, I will serve thee as I did thy father.' The perusal of this letter brought all his father's sufferings and dishonour to the Guru's mind, and galled him to the heart. He wrote in reply, ' What the Sikhs said is true. Even still thou utterest harsh words. Thou shalt assuredly suffer for all thy misdeeds. The torture thou didst inflict on such a philanthropic and peaceful Guru as my father, must bring its vengeance in time.