

LIFE OF GURU GOBIND SINGH, THE TENTH AND LAST GURU ¹

CHAPTER I

AN account of the early years of Guru Gobind Rai has already been given in the life of Guru Teg Bahadur. Guru Gobind Rai, after his father's death, continued with even more diligence than before to prepare himself for his great mission. He procured a supply of sharp-pointed arrows from Lahore, and practised archery with great industry. The Guru's principal companions and bodyguard at

¹ The main authorities for the life of Guru Gobind Singh are the *Vichitar Nātak*, or Wonderful Drama, composed by the Guru himself; the *Gur Bilās*, by Bhāi Sukha Singh; and the *Sūraj Parkāsh*, by Bhāi Santokh Singh.

The *Vichitar Nātak* is a metrical composition divided into fourteen chapters, and written in archaic Hindī with a large admixture of Sanskrit in the Gurumukhi character. The date is probably about A. D. 1692.

Bhāi Sukha Singh, the author of the *Gur Bilās*, was born in A. D. 1766 in Anandpur, where Guru Gobind Singh long had his residence. He became a pupil of Bhāis Bhagwān Singh and Thākur Singh, and was subsequently a *gyāni* or expounder of the Granth Sāhib at Kesgarh, where the tenth Guru first administered his baptism. Bhāi Sukha Singh completed the *Gur Bilās* in A. D. 1797, and died in A. D. 1838. His work is also in old Hindī in the Gurumukhi character.

The author has also consulted with advantage Bhāi Gyān Singh's *Panth Parkāsh*.

There is a book called the *Sau Sākhi* which professes to be a conversation between Sāhib Singh and Gurbakhsh Singh on the sayings and doings of the tenth Guru. It is held in high estimation by the Kūkas—followers of the late Bhāi Rām Singh of Bhaini, in the Ludhiāna district of the Panjāb—and is relied on by them as the main authority for their heresy. Santokh Singh sometimes gives Bhāi Gurbakhsh Singh's communications to Sāhib Singh as the basis of his history of the Gurus from the time of Guru Angad, but he makes no mention of the *Sau Sākhi*. There appears nothing to establish its authenticity.

this time were his aunt Viro's five sons—Sango Shah, Jit Mal, Gopal Chand, Ganga Ram, Mahri Chand; his uncle Suraj Mal's two grandsons, Gulab Rai and Sham Das; Kripal, his maternal uncle; Bhai Daya Ram, the friend of his youth; and Bhai Nand Chand, an upright and favourite masand. The descendants of the Gurus, the masands, and the sons and grandsons of those who had served Guru Gobind Rai's father and grandfather gathered round his standard. He also entertained a number of singers, who sang the Gurus' hymns, and a number of bards who composed and sang in succession quatrains in praise of the Gurus. So great was the enthusiasm that the women of the city used to climb the top stories of their houses and chant the Guru's praises in extempore verses.

A man called Bhikhia residing in Lahore went to visit the Guru. Bhikhia, seeing him handsome and well-proportioned, thought he would be a suitable match for his daughter Jito. The Guru's mother was pleased at Bhikhia's proposal, and asked her brother Kripal to advise the Guru to accept it. The Guru did so, and there were great rejoicings at Anandpur on the occasion of the betrothal. Great too were the rejoicings in Bhikhia's domestic circle when he returned home with the good news. The twenty-third of Har, Sambat 1734 (A.D. 1677), was fixed for the marriage, and Bhikhia returned to Anandpur to inform the Guru of the glad day, and invite him to proceed with his marriage procession to Lahore. The Guru, contrary to the custom on such occasions, refused to go to Lahore, and said he would make a Lahore near Anandpur for the occasion. He sent written orders in every direction for assistance, and his wishes were amply gratified. The Sikhs thronged from the Panjab capital on the occasion, and with them came Bhikhia and his family. Shopkeepers and merchants opened shops and warehouses, and abode in Anandpur until the

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completion of the nuptial ceremonies. After the marriage Bhikhia remained sometime with the Guru and performed all possible service for him.

The Guru, according to the custom of his predecessors, used to rise in the end of the night and perform his devotions. He particularly delighted to listen to the *Asa ki War*. After daybreak he gave his Sikhs divine instruction and then practised martial exercises. In the afternoon he received his Sikhs, went shooting, or raced horses; and ended the evening by performing the divine service of the *Rahiras*.

Once in the hot season when bathing with his cousins and other youths of the same age in the *Satluj*, the Guru divided the party into two opposing factions to play a game of splash-water. The Guru being endowed with superior strength reduced his cousin *Gulab Rai* to such straits that he with difficulty emerged from the water. In his confusion he began to put on the Guru's turban, believing it was his own. *Bhai Sango* ran to restrain him, for it would be a sacrilege for any one to put on the Guru's turban. *Gulab Rai* accordingly laid it down in consternation. The Guru saw the occurrence and begged *Gulab Rai* to bind the turban on his head, and it would some day obtain him honour. When in after days the Guru had to leave *Anandpur* for the *Dakhan*, *Gulab Rai* obtained possession of the city and established himself as Sikh priest there, thus fulfilling the Guru's prophecy.

The Guru delighted to wear uniform and arms, and practise, and induce others to practise, archery and musket-shooting. His handsome exterior was much admired both by men and women.

One day as he was seated in *darbar* some new converts to the Sikh faith came to do him homage. Among them was a Sikh, who had a daughter called *Sundari*, of marriageable age. He proposed to the Guru to wed her and make her the slave of his feet.

The Guru did not desire the alliance, but it was pressed on him by his mother, and not long afterwards the Guru's nuptials were solemnized.¹

We have already seen that Raja Ram of Asam implored Guru Teg Bahadur's intercession for a son, and a prince called Ratan Rai was duly born to him. Raja Ram died when his son was only seven years old. When Ratan Rai attained the age of twelve, he felt an inclination to see the son of the Guru by whose mediation he had been born. He accordingly, with his mother and several of his ministers, proceeded to Anandpur. He took with him as an offering five horses with golden trappings, a very small but sagacious elephant, a weapon out of which five sorts of arms could be made—first a pistol, then by pressing a spring a sword, then a lance, then a dagger, and finally a club—a throne from which, by pressing a spring, puppets emerged and played chaupar, a drinking cup of great value, and several costly and beautiful jewels and raiment.

The Raja was received in great state. He offered his presents, prayed the Guru to grant him the Sikh faith and sincerity, so that his love might be ever centred in the Guru's feet. The Guru granted all his desires. The Raja exhibited the excellence and advantages of all his presents. He showed how five weapons could be made out of one, he unloosened the puppets from the throne and set them playing chaupar. He caused the elephant to wipe the Guru's shoes and place them in order for him. The Guru at the Raja's suggestion discharged an arrow. The elephant went and fetched it. The animal held a jug of water from which the Guru's feet were washed, and then wiped them with a towel. At the

¹ A learned Sikh informs us that Sundari, a word which means the beautiful, frequently applied to the heroines of Indian history, was an epithet of Jito and not a second wife of the Guru. The same learned Sikh thinks that Jito, who was generally known as Sundari, did not die in Anandpur, but lived in Dihli after the demise of Guru Gobind Singh.

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word of command he took a chauri and waved it over the Guru. At night he took two lighted torches in his trunk, and showed the Guru and the Raja their homeward ways. In due time the Raja bade farewell to the Guru, and on his departure requested him never to let the elephant out of his possession.

Several men went to the Guru for enlistment, and his army rapidly increased. He now set about the construction of a big drum, without which he deemed his equipment would be incomplete. The work was entrusted to Nand Chand. When the masands found that it was nearly ready they said that when Bhim Chand, the king of the country, heard it, he would be wroth, and not suffer the Guru and his Sikhs to abide in the locality.¹ Afraid, however, to make a representation to the Guru himself, they went to his mother Gujari and expressed their sentiments: 'The Guru's expenditure on works of charity and philanthropy is already great, and now he is increasing his army and building a large drum. When the hill chiefs hear it beaten, they will regard it as a symbol of conquest and engage in battle with the Sikhs. He is daily adding to the number of his soldiers. Be pleased, O lady, to restrain him.' This speech convinced the Guru's mother. She sent for her brother Kripal, and begged him to dissuade her son from completing the drum. Kripal said he could not take it on himself to make any such representation to the Guru. She must do so herself. She accordingly spoke to her son next morning in the terms used by the masands to her. She added, 'Our business is with religion, for which humility is required. Even if thou complete the drum, beat it not in public.' The Guru replied, 'Mother dear, how long shall I remain in concealment? I am not going to take forcible possession of the hill rajas' territories. If they are jealous for nothing, and allow their hearts to rankle,

¹ In former times a rāja might not beat a drum within another rāja's territory, for beating a drum was a symbol of sovereignty.

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I cannot help it. This is the Guru's castle where men shall obtain their deserts.'

On this the Guru rose and went to inquire if the drum were ready. If not, its completion must be expedited. The masands then made a direct representation: 'Great King, first consider the resources of the enemy. They are kings and possess armies, wealth, and munitions of war. It is therefore not advisable to contend with them. What a number of troubles befell thy grandfather in his military career! Wherefore thou hast need of peace. Our Guru's business is with the Sikhism of his country; war is the rôle of kings.'

The Guru replied, 'How shall I conceal myself from those hillmen? I have received the immortal God's order to disclose myself, and you tell me to remain in concealment. I must obey God's order, not yours. I have prepared the drum because my army would have no prestige without it. Even if Bhim Chand, Raja of Kahlur, and the other hill rajas grow angry, are we who sit here women? We too shall meet sword with sword. If they keep the peace, so shall we. We shall soon see what the hillmen intend. When we go hunting, we shall take the drum with us, and beat it aloud on arriving at the base of the mountain.'

The Guru celebrated with prayers and the distribution of sacred food the completion of the big drum, which he called Ranjit, or victorious on the battle-field. When it was beaten, the men and women of the city went forth to behold it, and there was great rejoicing. The Guru and his men, in full panoply, went hunting the same day. When the party arrived near Bilaspur, the capital of Kahlur, the Guru's drummer beat the drum with much energy and ostentation. It sounded like thunder to the hillmen, who at once apprehended that some potentate had come to take possession of their country. Raja Bhim Chand consulted his

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prime minister who said, 'It is Guru Gobind Rai, the tenth Guru in succession to Guru Nanak, who hath arrived. His father purchased some land¹ at the base of the Tung mountain, and built a village thereon. Thousands of worshippers come to him from great distances. It is only recently that the Raja of Asam came to visit him and presented him large offerings. He hath constructed a drum and come shooting here. My advice is to keep on good terms with him. In the first place, he is worthy of worship, secondly, he maintaineth a large army and is greatly feared. Thirdly, he is very brave, and such men are sometimes useful as allies.'

On hearing this Raja Bhim Chand determined to go to meet the Guru, and dispatched his prime minister to arrange for the interview. The minister informed the Guru that his master, who was the head of all the hill chiefs, desired to meet him, and it would be well for the Guru to be on good terms with him. Bhai Kripal, the Guru's uncle, at a nod from the Guru replied, 'This is the Guru's castle. As any one treateth him, so shall he be treated. If any one come here with good intentions, he shall be well received; but if he come as an enemy, he shall be treated accordingly. For men to be on good terms with one another is very expedient and commendable. Wherefore go and bring your Raja. We shall receive him with great respect.' The minister taking with him a robe of honour—the Guru's gift—returned to his master, and recommended him to proceed immediately to the interview. The Raja accordingly went with his courtiers and escort to Anandpur.

Raja Bhim Chand was received in darbar with great honour by the Guru, who invited him to tell him the whole circumstances of the hill chiefs. Bhim Chand gave him the desired information, and then prayed the Guru to let him see the presents

¹ This is mentioned in the Life of Guru Teg Bahādur.

from the king of Asam. The Guru at that interview showed him all the presents, except the elephant. Next morning the Guru had a costly tent erected which had been sent him from Kabul by an enthusiastic Sikh named Duni Chand, and prepared to receive Bhim Chand in it at the second interview. With the Guru were his relations, courtiers, and principal wrestlers and warriors. When Bhim Chand saw the Kabuli tent he was astonished at its magnificence. In reply to his inquiry he was told that it had cost two and a half lakhs of rupees, and that it was the offering of a pious Sikh. During this conversation the elephant, beautifully decorated, was led forward. Bhim Chand expressed his unbounded admiration of all that he had seen and heard. On his homeward journey his mind burned with envy of the Guru's state and wealth, and he considered how he could take possession of all his valuables. On reflection, however, he came to the conclusion that he would be satisfied with the elephant, and he determined to have the animal whether by force or stratagem.

On his arrival in his capital he unfolded his design to his courtiers, and asked them to suggest how possession of the elephant could be obtained. After some discussion it was agreed that a message should be sent to the Guru to the effect that an embassy was coming from Srinagar in the present British Garhwal district, with the object of betrothing the daughter of its Raja, Fatah Shah, to Bhim Chand's son ; and Bhim Chand desired to borrow the elephant so as to make a display of wealth to his guests. It was accordingly decided that the Guru should be requested to lend the elephant for the purpose. When the Guru received this message he knew that it was simply a trick to obtain permanent possession of the animal. He thought to himself, ' If I refuse the elephant, it means war, and if I send him it also means war, as I must resort to force for his

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recovery.' He accordingly replied to Bhim Chand's message, 'The raja who presented me with the elephant requested me not to let the animal go out of my possession; and it is a principle of the Guru's house to comply with such requests. I have another elephant, and should Raja Bhim Chand require him he may take him.' The messenger seeing that there was no chance of obtaining the desired elephant hastened to return to Bilaspur.

The Guru's message was delivered with the addition that he did not seem afraid of any of the hill chiefs. Raja Bhim Chand, much incensed, consulted his prime minister, who advised him not to provoke a quarrel with the Guru. Bhim Chand angrily retorted, and charged his minister with age and cowardice. The Guru had shown contempt for him, and was he to calmly endure it? Upon this the minister advised his master to become a Sikh, receive initiation from the Guru, and all would be well. Bhim Chand replied, 'I am an idolater. I daily perform the tarpan,¹ and repeat the sandhia² and the gayatri. How can I forsake my religion, and become a Sikh of the Guru? In the first place, I cannot as a Hindu be on good terms with a man who hath discarded our holy faith. Secondly, none of the hill rajas hath become a Sikh, and they would all laugh at me were I to change my religion. They would say that I did it with the mercenary object of obtaining the elephant. In the third place, no men of high caste have joined the Guru. His followers are carriers, barbers, fishermen, washermen, sweepers, and similar nondescript persons. I am a great king of distinguished Rajput ancestors. How can I become the Guru's follower and stand before him with clasped hands in supplication? If he give

¹ A daily ceremony of the Hindus, in which water is presented to the manes of deceased ancestors.

² Prayers read by pious Hindus at morning and evening twilight. Sometimes similar prayers are offered at noon.

me not the elephant by peaceable means, I will take the animal by force. The Guru is already on bad terms with the Emperor, and, if he fall out with me also, he cannot abide here. He is still a mere boy ; arms are new to his hands. When I show him what I can do, he will know who I am and renounce his pride.'

Saying this Bhim Chand ordered his chief police officer to go to the Guru, and try to obtain the elephant by soft and persuasive words. If these failed, the Guru was to be threatened with the strength of Bhim Chand's army. The police officer went on his mission and addressed the Guru as directed. The Guru calmly replied, 'Thou givest one advice to me to lend the elephant, and another to Bhim Chand not to restore him.' Upon this the police officer knew that the Guru could divine the secrets of others and begged his forgiveness. The Guru then said, 'Tell the raja that if he have faith in the Guru and if his intentions be honest, the Guru can grant him what he desireth ; but if he practise fraud and deceit, the Guru can protect his own interests. The Guru knoweth the secrets of men's hearts, and thou canst not deceive him. When thou talkest of the strength of the raja's army, know that there is nothing wanting on the Guru's side either. The Guru is already prepared for battle. The Sikhs are not women, and they have had long practice in martial exercises.' The police officer departed and delivered this message to Bhim Chand, who decided that he would wait till the time had actually arrived for his son's marriage, and then he would repeat his request for the elephant, and add to it an application for the magnificent Kabuli tent also.