

Makhoval moved his capital to Anandpur in 1689. Only those who had fought at the battle of Bhangani were at first permitted to reside in Anandpur, a reward for their services and a message to those who had not joined their Guru.

The Guru's next battle was at Nadaun and again he was victorious. The ruler of Bilaspur sought his help against a Mughal army which had been sent to punish him and other hill chieftains who had refused to pay tribute. The Mughal army commander of Jammu had sent a force and Guru Gobind Singh joined the allies who confronted it at Nadaun. In spite of this victory, the ruler of Bilaspur with his supporters reached a settlement with the Mughals and agreed to pay tribute. Guru Gobind Singh had learnt once again how treacherous the hill chiefs could be.

From the point of view of the Mughals, the Guru was merely one of several hill chieftains, though perhaps rather more dangerous than the rest. The gatherings of armed men at Anandpur caused them some concern and in 1693 this feature was reported to Aurangzeb. A force was dispatched against Guru Gobind Singh, but its approach was reported to the Guru and Anandpur was duly prepared for a siege. The Mughal detachment did not attack and a second one was diverted by a rebellion on the part of other hill chieftains. The Guru supported the rebels, but when Aurangzeb finally sent his son to discipline them in 1696, he remained safely behind the walls he had erected at Anandpur.

### *The founding of the Khalsa*

Meanwhile Guru Gobind Singh was maintaining contact with his Sikhs on the plains, or at least with such of them as remained loyal to him. The growing independence and corruption of several of the *masands* was a cause for increasing concern. A century earlier the *masands* had been set up by Guru Ram Das with the intention that they would care for the needs of scattered *satgats* and remit their offerings to the Guru. The situation had been bad enough in the time of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, with the *masands* in control of much of the Majha and the gates of Amritsar closed against the Guru. Now

it was considerably worse, with practically the whole of the Majha territory and most of Doaba under these rival authorities.<sup>4</sup> This did not, of course, mean that the *masands* actually ruled over their respective *satgats*. The Mughal authorities in Lahore and Sirhind would have ensured that this did not happen. Nevertheless each one did control his *satgat*'s relations with the Guru and, where the *masand* chose, these could be effectively broken off. The offerings were still collected, but they went no further than the *masands*, who used them for their own purposes.

The *masands* seem to have cooperated in many cases with schismatic groups among the Sikhs. An indeterminate number of Sikhs were following members of Guru Ram Das's descendants who had set up rival Guru lineages, notably the descendants of Prithi Chand (the eldest brother of Guru Arjan) and of Dhir Mal (the elder brother of Guru Har Rai). To the Sikhs their followings were known respectively as the Minas and the Dhir-malias. Ram Rai, the elder brother of Guru Har Krishan, had also attracted a following known to the Sikhs as the Ram-raias, but his strength lay in the hills, where Aurangzeb had granted him the territory of Dehra Dun.

Many Sikhs, presumably ignorant of what was at issue, had been persuaded to join either the Minas or the Dhir-malias. The former commanded strength in the Majha region around Amritsar and the latter in Doaba around Kartarpur. A substantial part of each region appears to have been cut off from loyalty to Gobind Singh, whom the legitimate Sikhs regarded as the true Guru. This was either because of their allegiance to one of the pretender's families or because of the following of an independent *masand*.

Tradition (or at least strongly dominant tradition) relates that 1699 was the year in which Guru Gobind Singh took decisive action. In 1699 he announced to his followers the founding of the Khalsa and enjoined its discipline on all who accepted initiation into the order. The year 1699 is not definitively established as the date of foundation, but it is overwhelmingly accepted by Sikhs today.<sup>5</sup> The call went out to be present on Baisakhi Day, the first day of the Indian New Year and a day on which the Sikhs were accustomed to assemble for an annual festival. They were to come to Anandpur for the festival and they were to come armed.

When the festivities were at their height, the Guru suddenly appeared before the vast assembly and in a loud voice demanded the head of a Sikh. A stunned silence greeted this unexpected request and at first no one was willing to oblige. Eventually Daya Singh, a Khatri from Lahore, stood up and declared himself willing to sacrifice his head if that should be the will of the Guru. Daya Singh was led into a tent, the thud of a falling sword was heard and the Guru reappeared carrying a bloodstained weapon. He then demanded a second victim and Dharam Singh, a Jat, eventually agreed to surrender his head if that was what the Guru wished. The procedure was repeated and again the Guru emerged with his sword covered in blood, demanding that a third Sikh give his head. The third one to come forward was Himmat Singh, the fourth one was Sahib Singh, and the fifth one was Muhakam Singh.

Details then vary. One tradition holds that Guru Gobind Singh had actually cut off the five Sikhs' heads, but replaced them when the drama was over. Another maintains that, with the five Sikhs apparently slain, he drew back the side of the tent to reveal all five alive, accompanied by five slaughtered goats. Yet another insists that the Guru could never have slain goats. Whatever was done behind the screen, the five live Sikhs were dressed in appropriate garments and led out of the tent. There is a substantial number of these miscellaneous details which create considerable feeling on the part of some Sikhs who discuss this issue today, but at least the general picture is clear. The five Sikhs who had volunteered to give their heads were thereafter known as the *Pañj Piārē* (the Cherished Five or the Five Beloved).

The next morning the Guru administered the Khalsa initiation to them, the *khanda dī pāṭhal* or 'sword ritual'. For this purpose water was stirred in an iron vessel with a double-edged sword and was sweetened with patashas (sweets) which the Guru's second wife, Mata Jito, cast into it. The Guru then dispensed the *amrit* (the 'nectar' or water thus prepared), first letting it run off his sword on to the initiate's face five times. Five times he poured it into the initiate's cupped hands, five times he applied it to his eyes and five times he sprinkled it on his hair. All then had to eat *karāḥ prasād* from the same iron bowl. Many Sikhs maintain that, when it was over, he instructed the Panj Piare to administer initiation to him. The Guru had brought the Khalsa into

being and he then proceeded (so those who accept this tradition believe) to accept his own initiation from the Khalsa.

Next the Guru promulgated the Rahit (the Khalsa code of belief and conduct). All those who accepted initiation into the Khalsa were required as an essential part of the Rahit to wear the Five Ks (the *pañj kakkē* or *pañj kakār*), so called because each of the five articles begins with the letter 'k'. These were *kes* (uncut hair), *kañghā* (comb), *karā* (iron or steel wrist-ring), *kirpān* (sword) and *kachh* (the pair of breeches which must not come below the knee). Male members were to add the name 'Singh' to their given name and female members were to add 'Kaur'. Finally the Panj Piare administered the rite to all who chose to accept it. Tradition reports that many thousands of those gathered there accepted initiation into the Khalsa. All this took place on the ground now overlooked by Kesgarh Sahib Gurdwara, second only to the Golden Temple in sanctity.

We have here the founding of the Khalsa according to Sikh tradition. It is most unlikely – indeed impossible – that tradition would be seriously astray on an event so critical for the future of the Panth. Equally, however, it would be strange for tradition to get it all right, and in fact there are already questions raised by the details which cause disagreement among the faithful.

The traditional reason for the creation of the Khalsa is to ensure that every Sikh (or at least every grown Sikh male) would be instantly recognizable. In a crowd of thousands he would immediately stand out. Being thus conspicuous, he would be in no temptation to hide himself when danger was abroad. He would stand up for his Guru, and, when standing up meant fighting, then fight he would. The Guru's Sikhs were, moreover, required to stand forth for a purpose. The origin may have been the need to defend the Guru, but the long-term purpose was to smite and destroy the Mughal empire. For this reason they were to be imbued with a new and unique spirit. They were to regard themselves as the chosen messengers of Akal Purakh and for this reason all Mughals were to be seen as the enemy who must be overcome. Later, with the fighting against the Afghans in the middle of the eighteenth century, the role of adversary was extended to all Muslims. All Muslims (not just the Mughals or their servants) thus became the enemies of the Khalsa.

This is the traditional reason for the founding of the Khalsa and certainly it carries much conviction. There is, however, another reason, namely the Guru's determination to terminate the authority of the *masands* and abolish the order. In instructing his Sikhs to join his Khalsa the Guru was, in effect, summoning them to join something which already existed. *Khalsa* was a term employed in Mughal terminology to designate those lands that were under the direct care and supervision of the emperor, separate from those which were entrusted to provincial governors and rent-free landowners. In the same way, the Guru's Khalsa consisted of those Sikhs who were cared for by the Guru personally as opposed to others who were entrusted to the *masands*. In summoning Sikhs to join his Khalsa, the Guru was commanding them to renounce the authority of the *masands* and attach their allegiance direct to the Guru.

This means that he was abolishing the *masand* system, a system that had performed a valuable service on behalf of the early Gurus but which had long outlived its usefulness. Sikhs were commanded to have nothing to do with the *masands* and those who obeyed them. Included in the same condemnation were the Minas, the Dhir-malias and the Ram-raias, who, together with the *masands* and the followers of the *masands* comprised the *Pañj Mel* or the original Five Reprobate Groups.

This explanation cannot stand alone, however, for it would mean that *all* Sikhs were summoned to join the Khalsa, not just those prepared to be prominently visible and to fight for their Guru under any circumstances. It would mean that Sikhs who cut their hair (the Sahaj-dhari Sikhs) would also belong to the Khalsa, though they could hardly have received the Khalsa initiation and certainly would not observe its Rahit.<sup>6</sup> Obviously membership in the Khalsa order involved more than merely renouncing the *masands*. It involved a very conspicuous appearance (for Sikh men at least), and this the Sahaj-dharis were not prepared to accept. The Guru's actions were represented as contrary to the expectations of his Brahman and Khatri followers, with the result that many of them refused initiation. The former disappear almost entirely from the following of the Guru and the Khatri stay on in reduced numbers as mainly Sahaj-dhari Sikhs. In other words, they did not accept initiation and they did not observe the Rahit.

The Panth therefore became, in terms of its caste constituency, even more strongly Jat. Was the Rahit which was delivered to the newly formed Khalsa shaped by their ideals? Two of the items assuredly included in the simple Rahit which was promulgated at this stage were keeping hair uncut and bearing arms. These would certainly have borne a close correspondence to Jat patterns of behaviour and would, at the same time, have had much to do with the reluctance of Khatri and Brahman Sikhs to enlist in the Khalsa. It poses a continuing question for the Panth, one which will be examined in greater detail when dealing specifically with the Rahit.<sup>7</sup>

The institution of the Khalsa, with its conspicuous external symbols, also raises the question of how its creation could possibly be reconciled with Guru Nanak's adamant insistence that external features must necessarily stand squarely in the way of liberation through the divine Name. In this particular case Sikhs have no difficulty in giving a response. The theological answer is the same one as is given for the introduction of changes by Guru Amar Das or of worldly activities by Guru Hargobind. The answer is that there is only one Guru, successively inhabiting ten human bodies, and what Gobind Singh decreed at the end of the seventeenth century was what Nanak would have decreed in the same circumstances more than 150 years earlier.

### *The assault on Anandpur*

The tradition continues with a Mughal decision to destroy this troublesome person who was making problems for them on the fringe of their empire. Vazir Khan was the Mughal governor of Sirhind (the province immediately adjacent to the Guru's territories), and, aided by the Guru's enemies among the hill rulers, he laid siege to Anandpur. Many are the tales of heroism told of this episode in the Guru's career. The actual siege began in 1701 when an alliance of the jealous hill rajas joined forces to attack the Guru. Their prize weapon was an elephant trained to wield a mighty sword with its trunk. Protected with heavy iron shields and inflamed with intoxicants, the rampaging creature threatened to batter down the gates of Lohgarh, one of the

two fortresses within Anandpur. A famous warrior, Bachitra Singh, was dispatched by the Guru to deal with the monster. He thrust his lance with such force that it pierced the elephant's frontal shield and penetrated its forehead. Squealing with pain, the crazed brute turned on its own army and, with threshing sword, ran amok among the besieging troops. The havoc it caused was so serious that (according to tradition) the hill rajas were forced to raise the siege and depart in disarray.

The rajas, however, regrouped their armies and returned again, this time supported by Vazir Khan and a Mughal force from Sirhind. Under the command of Vazir Khan, the alliance laid determined siege to Anandpur in 1704 and by maintaining a tight cordon for several months brought the garrison near to starvation. Many of the Guru's followers, ground down by the privations of the siege, renounced their allegiance to him and departed. Those who remained were ordered to prepare for evacuation.

On the night of 20–21 December 1704 the surviving garrison, led by the Guru, broke out of Anandpur. With a group of those who escaped, the Guru managed to secure a small fort in the village of Chamkaur, several kilometres away. Again they were besieged and this time the attackers were determined to secure their objective. The Guru's two elder sons were killed during the attack and it seemed the same fate must await him also. His surviving followers insisted, however, that he must be preserved, and under cover of darkness he was able to slip through the Mughal cordon.

Travelling alone, the Guru eventually found himself in the Machhiwara wasteland. There he was discovered by Sikhs who had also escaped and was given shelter by the headman of the neighbouring village. After leaving Machhiwara the Guru evaded his Mughal pursuers by disguising himself as a Sufi holy man from the distant town of Uch. Soon after his escape he learnt of Vazir Khan's most despicable act. The Guru's two younger sons, captured with their mother following the evacuation of Anandpur, had been delivered to Vazir Khan. Having offered the two children the usual choice between conversion to Islam or death the governor ordered the defiant children to be bricked up alive in the city wall. This particular incident made a deep and continuing impression on the Panth, as is illustrated by the

frequency with which the scene is still a subject for the popular art of the Sikhs.

Moving on to Khidrana in Firozpur district, the Guru gathered his scattered force again and another battle took place. Among the slain were forty Sikhs who had earlier renounced their allegiance to the Guru but who had been shamed by their women when they returned to their homes. Rejoining the Guru's army, they now sealed their restored loyalty by death. Encountering the last dying survivor on the battlefield, the Guru forgave their desertion and acknowledged their renewed allegiance. Ever since they have been remembered as the Forty Liberated (*chālī muktē*), still commemorated in the prayer of the Khalsa known as *Ardās*.<sup>8</sup>

From Khidrana (or Muktsar as it came to be called) the Guru moved on to Talvandi Sabo in Bhatinda district, known to Sikhs as Damdama or 'resting place'. In Damdama Sahib he remained for about one year. Tradition relates that here he occupied himself with converting the villagers of surrounding villages and in recording the sacred scriptures. The manuscript of the Adi Granth was in the hands of the family of Dhir Mal, who refused the Guru's request to hand it over. For this reason the Guru recorded not only large portions of the Dasam Granth but also (from memory) the complete text of the Adi Granth.

It should be emphasized that many of these stories derive from strictly traditional history, not from sources that have been properly researched. This applies to many of the anecdotes related of the period covering the Guru's travels from Anandpur to Damdama Sahib. On one occasion, it is related, the Guru, following his escape from Machhiwara, was given shelter in the village of Jatpura (Ludhiana District) by a Muslim official called Rai Kalha. Before leaving he presented Rai Kalha with a sword, adding that it was never to be used. It was to be retained as an honoured memento. Rai Kalha and his son both respected the Guru's instruction, but his grandson ignored it and used the sword for hunting. The Guru's command cannot thus be mocked. While attempting to slay a stag, the grandson accidentally struck himself with the sword and died of the self-inflicted wound.

On another occasion, shortly after the battle of Muktsar, the Guru is said to have shot a partridge, plucked it and cast it before his falcon.

After some hesitation the falcon began to eat the dead bird. The partridge, explained the Guru, had been a cultivator in his last incarnation and the falcon had been a moneylender. The cultivator, having borrowed funds from the moneylender, had squandered them. When the moneylender demanded his due payment, the cultivator asked for more time, naming the Guru as his surety. The debt remained unpaid and eventually both died. Reincarnated as partridge and falcon, they had been brought together again so the debtor could repay what he owed. The Guru, acting as guarantor, had ensured that this would be done. All who make similar promises in the Guru's name should remember that eventually they will be compelled to pay their debts.

### *The death of Guru Gobind Singh*

During the assault on Anandpur and the retreat to southern Punjab the Mughal emperor had been Aurangzeb. Guru Gobind Singh evidently assisted Aurangzeb's son, Bahadur Shah, in his inevitable war of succession, and once Aurangzeb was dead the Guru travelled down to Agra where Bahadur Shah was now installed. Bahadur Shah received him graciously, but did not do anything about punishing Vazir Khan for the attack on Anandpur. Guru Gobind Singh joined Bahadur Shah with a retinue of troops and travelled down to the Deccan with him. There, in the small town of Nander on the banks of the Godavari, he was stabbed in the abdomen by a Pathan whom tradition firmly attaches to Vazir Khan. The Pathan was dispatched by the Guru and the stab wounds were stitched up. A few days later, however, the stitching broke (one tradition says that the Guru was testing a new bow which had been brought to him) and the end was near. He died shortly after, on 7 October 1708.

Before he died, realizing his end was near, the Guru summoned his Sikhs and declared that the line of personal Gurus was now at an end. Thereafter they should regard the functions of the Guru as vested in the Granth (which became the Guru Granth) and the Panth (the Guru Panth). In this way the Guru will remain ever-present and ever-accessible to his Sikhs. It is not made clear which Granth is

referred to (whether the Adi Granth, or both the Adi Granth and the Dasam Granth). Likewise, the definition of the Panth is left uncertain. Is it the wider Nanak-panth or is it the narrower Khalsa Panth? These cause continuing debate, but not so the general intention of the Guru. The line of personal Gurus was at an end and the Guru would thereafter be present in the Granth and the Panth.

This is, of course, the voice of tradition which is speaking. Did Guru Gobind Singh, before he died, actually confer the function of Guru on the scripture (the Guru Granth) and the gathered community (the Guru Panth)? The traditional command was that with his death the line of personal Gurus was to come to an end and thereafter the Sikhs should look to the sacred Book (or Books) and to the community. Did he or did he not so instruct his Sikhs? Or do we not know?

One possibility is that the tradition arose because Guru Gobind Singh had died without a living heir. His two elder sons had been killed at the battle of Chamkaur during the evacuation of Anandpur, and the two younger sons had been captured and executed by Vazir Khan in Sirhind. The Guru's death therefore involved his followers in a problem. Banda, the Guru's successor as military leader, was acknowledged by some as Guru, but as he was not a member of the Guru's family, others withheld their allegiance. Eventually the difficulty was resolved by treating the gathered Panth as the corporate presence of the Guru, its decisions having the same effect as the decisions of the personal Guru himself. Meetings of the Panth would also be conducted in the presence of both sacred scriptures, and so they too came to be regarded as the eternal Guru.

This theory is, however, too neat. The presence of the Adi Granth was already recognized as the Guru even while the personal Guru was still alive, and meetings of a *saingat* also involved the Guru, at which he would be mystically present. Clearly the doctrine represents a more complicated situation than the theory allows. There is, moreover, a source that is probably much closer to the death of Guru Gobind Singh and which supports the tradition. *Gur Sobhā* was written by a poet called Sainapati who had elected not to become a member of the Khalsa but who was a loyal follower of Guru Gobind Singh. A strong probability favours 1711 as the year of the completion of *Gur Sobhā*, and in it Sainapati writes as follows:

On an earlier occasion the Guru had been approached by his Sikhs and had been asked what form the [eternal] Guru would assume [after he had departed this earthly life]. He had replied that it would be the Khalsa. 'The Khalsa is now the focus of all my hopes and desires,' he had declared. 'Upon the Khalsa which I have created I shall bestow the succession. The Khalsa is my physical form and I am one with the Khalsa. To all eternity I shall be manifest in the Khalsa. They whose hearts are purged of falsehood will be known as the true Khalsa; and the Khalsa, freed from error and illusion, will be my true Guru.'

'And my true Guru, boundless and infinite, is the eternal Word, the Word of wisdom which the devout contemplate in their hearts, the Word which brings ineffable peace to all who utter it, the Word which is wisdom immeasurably unfolded, the Word which none may ever describe. This is the light which is given to you, the refuge of all who inhabit the world, and the abode of all who renounce it.'<sup>9</sup>

If 1711 is the correct date for *Gur Sobhā*, the traditional version receives very strong support. The balance of probability favours the claim that the Guru actually made the crucial pronouncement; and it seems safe to assume that Guru Gobind Singh, in all likelihood, declared that after his death the Khalsa Panth and the scripture would embody the personality and the guidance of the mystical Guru. Note, however, that Sainapati explicitly designates the Khalsa as one of the two recipients, not the wider Sikh Panth. What is not clear is why Sainapati himself declined to join the Khalsa.

This discussion of the final intention of Guru Gobind Singh also carries over to the question of the Dasam Granth, which in the eighteenth century shared with the *Adi Granth* the status of the eternal Guru. It too was, for a time, a part of the Guru Granth, for accounts of the eighteenth-century meetings of the Sarbat Khalsa (the 'entire Khalsa') explicitly mention that these meetings were held in the presence of the two open scriptures. According to the traditional view, the contents of the Dasam Granth were all written by Guru Gobind Singh himself, much of it during the time he spent at Damdama Sahib following the evacuation of Anandpur. The Sikhs thereafter had two scriptures, the *Adi Granth* and the Dasam Granth. Detailed consideration of the Dasam Granth must await its treatment in the chapter dealing with Sikh scriptures.<sup>10</sup>

Guru Gobind Singh looms very large indeed in the consciousness of Sikhs and for that reason he figures prominently in the stories of their faith. He shares with Guru Nanak much the greater part of Sikh tradition, attracting accounts of supreme heroism and anecdotes which display his profound wisdom and common sense. Dressed in gorgeous raiment with a plume in his turban, seated on his horse and armed to defend his Panth, his is a regal figure which shines brightly in the memory of his Sikhs and gives rise to noble traditions. These traditions are very important in the continuing growth of the Panth. Their growth tells us much about his followers in the years and the centuries that follow.