

Baisakhi Day 1699 and the Gift of Chardi Kalaa



by *SS Shanti Kaur Khalsa*

The late seventeenth century was a brutal time in India. The world had the noose of the Kali Yuga around its neck, the age of darkness, and it was pinching deeply. It was a time where it was punishable by death to sit next to someone of higher rank. Where, at the whim of the local ruler, dozens of common people could be rounded up and their blood fed to the emperor's hounds. This was the state of existence on the great continent of Bharat; the price of life was cheap, and in the matter of life and death there was no court of appeal.

Into this environment Sikhism emerged as a ray of radiant light. Guru Nanak brought hope and dignity to a people in crisis, and his message of universal love was received like rain in the desert. In 1666, Gobind Rai was born and later became the 10th Guru of the Sikhs. His path was unique and he took human birth with the focused intent to challenge the tyrants and uproot the evil-doers who had terrorized the people of the world. He writes in his autobiography:

ਹਮ ਇਹ ਕਾਜ ਜਗਤ ਮੋ ਆਏ ।
ਧਰਮ ਹੇਤ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ ਪਠਾਏ ।
ਜਹਾਂ ਤਹਾਂ ਤੁਮ ਧਰਮ ਬਿਥਾਰੋ ।
ਦੁਸਟ ਦੋਖਯਨਿ ਪਕਰਿ ਪਛਾਰੋ

I came to this world with a mission,
The Lord delegated me for the cause of righteousness;
“Go and spread Dharma here, there and everywhere
And defeat the tyrants and evil persons. (42)
~ Guru Gobind Singhji, Bichitra Naatak – Apnee Kathaa

Guru Gobind Singh had a challenge unequalled by any in history. From a spiritual community of devotees, poets, and gentle philosophers, he needed to create an invincible army that could challenge and defeat the brutal mughal regime. His grandfather, Guru Hargobind Sahib, had laid the path of *Miri Piri*, that of temporal and spiritual mastery, but it was the great King Guru Gobind Singh ji Maharaj who made it possible for all people to walk it.

On the 13th of April, Baisakhi 1699, in a dramatic event that was brilliant in its quality of leadership, Guru Gobind Singh created the brotherhood of the Khalsa. Standing before a crowd of 80,000 people, he unsheathed his sword and called for any Sikh to come forward and give his head to Guru. Leaning forward and searching face to face the Guru boomed in an unforgiving voice. “I need a head! Who is willing to satisfy the calling of my sword!” The crowd was stunned into silence, never seeing the Guru in this mood before.

Daya Ram, a shopkeeper from Lahore, startled even himself when he stood up and moved purposely to the stage. The incredible intensity in the Guru’s whole body drew him like a magnet. His heart swelled and pumped so loud that he could hardly hear his own voice as he replied “Guru Sahib, my head is yours.” Moving through the crowd to the stage he climbed up and folded his

hands before the Guru. Guru Gobind Rai took him by the arm, and with a fierce glance over his shoulder, he led him into a tent at the rear of the stage. Moments later, the Guru strode back onto the stage with his sword dripping with crimson blood.

A gasp spread through the sangat as the Guru walked to the very edge of platform and raised the wet sword over his head and roared. "I need the head of another Sikh. Is there any among you who will quench the thirst of my sword?" If there was any confusion at first what the Guru was doing, it was clear now that he was beheading his Sikhs and panic stirred amongst the people. However, Dharm Das, a Jat from Delhi, came forward in a state of total devotion and grace followed by Himmat, a water bearer from Jagannath, Mohkam Chand, a washerman from Dwarka, and Sahib Chand, a barber from Bidar Karnatka. One by one they disappeared with the Guru into the tent. No one was prepared for what happened next – when these five beloved ones emerged from the tent, dressed in beautiful clothes and dazzling in spiritual radiance. In the days that followed, tens of thousands of Sikhs were baptized. The brotherhood of the Khalsa was born, emerging with a unique and irresistible identity.

One of the most uplifting aspects of becoming part of the Khalsa was, and still is today, the concept given to us by Guru Gobind Singh of *Chardi Kalaa* – the exaltation of the human spirit to a higher plane. Daily in the Sikh Ardas we say:

ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮ ਚੜ੍ਹਦੀ ਕਲਾ ਤੇਰੇ ਭਾਣੇ ਸਰਬੱਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ ।

"Nanak, through the Naam, may the Spirit be exalted. And may all people prosper by Your grace."

It is this concept of *Chardi Kalaa* that allowed the Sikhs to be transformed from common people to Warrior-Saints. *Chardi Kalaa* is a simple but sophisticated spiritual state of being, where the Will of the Creator is manifestly accepted as the only True Reality. In that reality there is no sadness, regret, depression or any other of the multitudes of negative feelings that mankind continually indulges in. When these negative feelings engulf a man, he feels small, limited, and incapable. But take away those haunting emotions, and every person can rise as a formidable Warrior-Saint. As explained by the late Siri Singh Sahib Bhai Sahib Harbhajan Singh Khalsa Yogiji:

"Yesterday is gone, but you can be miserable by the memory of it. It won't do you any good. It is yesterday and it is already gone. Even today is going. You can't stop it. You can only welcome tomorrow in the name of the good will of humans, the

Grace of Guru, and the consciousness of God. That is the only positive way to live, and that is the alphabet of a Sikh. It is called "Chardi Kalaa."

Chardi Kalaa is a very simple thing. Welcome tomorrow and forget yesterday. And welcome tomorrow with the spirit of perpetual endurance. Because God gave you the breath of life for tomorrow and if that breath is true for you, then you should be true for it. The moment you start welcoming tomorrow consciously, "Ang Sang Wahe Guru" will happen." Yogi Bhajan 3/10/1991

Guru Gobind Singh lived in the ecstasy of *Chardi Kalaa* all the days of his life. As a human being, he faced loss and hardship that would have broken the heart and spirit of another man. But the great Guru Gobind Singh was not made of the mettle of normal humans. After the Sikhs took their stand against the cruelties of the mughal empire, the persecution against their people was relentless. In the early years of the 18th century, the Guru's two elder sons were martyred in battle; Ajit Singh, age 18, and Jujhar Singh, age 14. Soon after, his two younger sons Zorawar Singh, age 9 and Fateh Singh, age 7 were captured and brutally murdered when they refused to convert to Islam. Through the shock and pain of this heartless action his mother, Mata Gujri, also died. During these dark days, thousands of his Singhs attained martyrdom as his people made a stand against the religious intolerance of the mughal regime. Death waited at every turn.

Yet with all these events, the Guru was not depressed. The Guru was not despondent. The Guru was not withdrawn. His spirit was so exalted, so manifest, and so one with the One that his internal glow, his *Chardi Kalaa*, was not dimmed. An old manuscript entitled "Parchian Sewadas", written in 1708 and translated into English in 1995 by the respected scholars Kharak Singh and Gurtej Singh, gives us an authentic sakhi of Guru Gobind Singh by which we get a glimpse of his state of *Chardi Kalaa*:

"Episode No. 28. ...The Guru was engaged in a prolonged war with the empire. In this war, all the four sahibzadas (Guru's sons) ...fell (as) martyrs. A large number of Sikhs also died. The treasury, the horses, and the entire wealth were plundered by the enemy. ... The Sikhs stared bewailing.

"Brothers, why do you bewail? The Guru has lost nothing", said the Guru.

"O True emperor, all the four sahibzadas have become martyrs; treasures, horses and wealth have gone; Sikhs have died. That is why we mourn."

"The Sahibzadas will keep coming for the sake of faith. The treasures, horses and property were all the creation of God. Under His Will these were acquired. Under His Will these disappeared." The Guru asked the Sikhs to draw lines in the dust

with their hands. The Sikhs drew lines in the dust, and then rubbed them off at the Guru's command.

"Do you feel sad or happy over drawing these lines or rubbing them off?" asked the Guru.

"O True Emperor, we have felt nothing of the kind."

"Just as you did not experience any happiness or sorrow over the drawing or obliteration of the lines, in the same way the Guru did not feel happy or sad over the acquisition or loss of material possessions. Grasp this thing in your hearts firmly. The Guru is above happiness or sorrow."

"O True Emperor," they cried, "the losses run into hundreds of thousands."

"But you have gained an insight which is worth tens of million," said the Guru.

~ Parchian Sewadas, page 60

In his grace and clarity of mind, Guru Gobind Singh wrote a letter to Emperor Aurangzeb laying bare the godless actions of his rule, penetrating the Emperor's fanatic disposition like an arrow shot into a melon. Aurangzeb was shocked and awakened with the Guru's words, and he called a halt to his mad campaign of death against the Sikhs.

This respite from the persecution in early 1706 is known as the Lakhi Jungle period. Guru Gobind Singh and a handful of Singhs traveled throughout the Malwa blessing his Sikhs, passing through the rural villages of Sarain, Nautheha, Tahlian, Fattu Rupana, and Chhataiania. One day at about sunset the Guru and his Singhs were riding through a wild forest of great beauty. The Master was absorbed in the appreciation of the magnificence of God's creation, and so he rode in silent meditation. One of the Singhs said, "Guru ji, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but this is the time of Rehras diwan."

The Guru stopped his horse, got down, and ordered all to assemble around him as they started their evening prayers. One of the Singhs went to his nearby village and returned with food, bedding and other camp supplies for the night. The Guru was so taken by the natural beauty of the place, he decided to stay there for a while and gave it the name *Lakhi Jungle*.

Word spread like wildfire throughout the Punjab that the Guru had made camp in the Lakhi Jungle. Even though it was still dangerous to travel, the Khalsa came in floods to see their Guru. Tears of joy were overflowing as the sangat once again beheld the brilliant majesty of the King of kings, Guru Gobind Singh ji Maharaj. Langar was served, kirtan was sung, battle skills were celebrated, and daily the sangat basked in the darshan of Guru Gobind Singh. Great poetry was written in those days of joy, and thousands of people partook in

the daily Amrit Sanchar. After years of hardship, it was a time of *Chardi Kalaa* for all the sangat as they once again filled their hearts with the love and light of Guru Gobind Singh.

ਲੱਖੀ ਜੰਗਲ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਆਇ ਦੀਦਾਰ ਲਗੋ ਨੇ॥
ਸੁਣ ਕੈ ਸੱਦ ਮਾਹੀ ਦਾ ਮੇਂਹੀ ਪਾਣੀ ਘਾਹੁ ਮਤੋ ਨੇ॥
ਕਿਸੇ ਨਾਲ ਨ ਰਲੀਆ ਕਾਈ ਕੋਈ ਸਉਕ ਪਿਯੋ ਨੇ॥
ਗਿਆ ਫਿਰਾਕ ਮਿਲਿਆ ਮਿਤ ਮਾਹੀ ਤਾਹੀ ਸੁਕਰ ਕਿਤੋ ਨੇ॥

Siri Mukvak Patshai Dasveh

Amrit Kirtan Pg 555

In the Lakhi Jungle, the Khalsa heard of His coming and they longed to see Him.

Just like when the water buffalo hear the call of the herdsman, they leave their food and water to rush to him.

In their joy and excitement they ran to see their Beloved, each trying to pass the other to get their first.

Their pain was gone when they met the Guru, the herdsman, and they gave thanks!

Today, as in the days of the Tenth Guru, Sikhs strive for the grace of *Chardi Kalaa*. Given to us as gift by the Amrit of the Double-edge Sword, *Chardi Kalaa* is the birthright of all Sikhs. To live with a clear mind and a personality undimmed by sorrow is the path of the Warrior-Saint. Guru tells us to sit in the Sadh Sangat and let the light of the Guru wash over our being, and this state of *Chardi Kalaa* will effortlessly engulf us. This has never been more needed than today. May the Baisakhi of 2006 awaken the love of Guru and the joy of *Chardi Kalaa* in all His Sikhs.