

Guru Arjan's Martyrdom

As was to be expected, the natural loss of *Gurgaddī* (ਗੁਰਗੱਦੀ) also came as a great shock to the over-ambitious Prithī Cand. He now began to make all sorts of machinations to see Gurū Arjan ousted. Gurū Arjan did his best to placate him and assigned him to all the income that was to accrue from property. For the maintenance of the community-kitchen and other institutions of the Sikh Nation, he depended on voluntary offering of the Sikhs.

Prithīa's machinations and his exploiting of some segments of the Sikh community led to trying times for Gurū Arjan and his Nation. The flow of income into the Sikh Nation dwindled and Sikh institutions, including the laṅgar (ਲੰਗਰ), suffered. Even musicians of the Gurū, such as Sattā and Balvand (ਸਤਾ ਬਲਵੰਡ), parted company with Gurū Arjan. Gurū Arjan, however, remained detached and imperturbable in his omniscient harmony with the Divine will. Bhāī Gurdās, a maternal uncle of Gurū Arjan and an ardent Sikh preacher on assignment at Agra, came to know of the state of affairs at Cak Rāmdās. He came back and with the help of devoted Bābā Buḍḍhā, showed Prithī Cand his proper place and checked the pilferage of the much needed revenue for construction works that were going on at that time. The Gurū asked the Sikhs to contribute one-tenth of their income to the Gurū's exchequer.

After initial animosity and acts of meanest treachery, for which Prithī Cand, the elder brother of Gurū Arjan, earned the sobriquet Mīṇā (the detestable) from Bhāī Gurdās, he had reconciled a bit with his lot in the hope that after Gurū Arjan's dying issueless, the *gurgaddī* would automatically pass on to his son, Miharbān. But this was not to be. The birth of a child to Gurū Arjan upset his plan. He again became at loggerheads with the Gurū. Many a hymn left by Gurū Arjan and recorded in the Gurū Granth Sāhib, reveal attempts made by him on the life of the little child and his providential escape every time. Prithī Cand, in collusion with Akbar's Hindu courtier Bīrbal, imposed a visitor's tax on the residents of Amritsar. On Gurū's advice, the *khatrīs* of Amritsar refused to pay the tax, upon which Bīrbal (ਬੀਰਬਲ) – a representative of Brahminism -- was furious.

He decided to raze Amritsar to ground, but before he could proceed towards Amritsar, he got an order from Jahāṅgīr to fight the Yusufzāīs. Bīrbal was killed in the battle. Prithī Cand then instigated the Muslim Governor of Jalandhar, Sulhī Khān, and incited him to attack and harass the Gurū, but Sulhī Khān met an ignominious death by a fall in a live kiln on his way to Cak Rāmdās or Rāmdāspur. Prithī Cand felt very discomfited and was always in search of fresh excuses to vilify and harm Gurū Arjan. Gurū Arjan thanked Akāl Purakh.

Gurū Arjan invited martyrdom because his sovereign ways threatened the religious, political and social establishment of the time. The key players representing the establishment included the arrogant Brahminical order represented by Candū Shāh, an intolerant Sufī sect represented by Shekh Ahmad Sirhadī (ਸ਼ੇਖ ਅਹਮਦ ਸਿਰਹਦੀ) and an illegitimate government represented by Jahāṅgīr (ਜਹਾਂਗੀਰ), who had usurped the throne. There is a strong attempt to

deprecate Sikh memory and this piece presents not just an overview of the martyrdom of Gurū Arjan, but also an exercise to understand how Sikh history is being distorted.

Sikh historical accounts put the blame of Gurū Arjan's martyrdom largely on Candū Shah, who was one of emperor Jahāṅgīr's divāns or finance officials. The reasons for Candū's stand against the Sikh Gurū were two:

- Gurū Arjan refused to marry his son, Hargobind, to Candū's daughter upon the counsel of the sangat of Delhi. Candū interpreted this refusal as deliberate humiliation and stirred feelings of animosity within Candū. Such virulent reactions to perceived wounded pride prevail in Punjab even today.
- As an upper-caste Hindu and as a representative of Brahminism, Candū took exception to Gurū Arjan's growing influence that sought to create an egalitarian society at the expense of the stratified caste-structure that gave special status to men like Candū. He allied with Gurū Arjan's brother, Prithī Chand – another detractor of the Sikh movement – to orchestrate the martyrdom of Gurū Arjan by filing a formal complaint in the Mughal court.

Muhsin Fani, the author of *Dabistan-i-Mazhaib*, a contemporary account in Persian, says that a heavy fine of Rupees 100,000 was imposed against the Gurū who refused to pay it. The Sikh oral history is unambiguous about Candū's role in carrying out tortures against Gurū Arjan after convincing Jahāṅgīr. The Gurū was made to sit on a hot iron plate, hot sand was thrown over his body and he was boiled in a cauldron. He was, therefore, deprived of food and water and put into hot blazing sand and stoned, which caused blood to ooze out of his head. He was tortured for three to five days. The Gurū remained in a blissful state, accepting this physical torture as God's "sweet Will." With wounds blistering on his body, on May 30, 1606, tied hand and feet, he was thrown into river Rāvī (ਰਾਵੀ).

Jahāṅgīr should not be held responsible for the Gurū's martyrdom. He did play some role. Candū and other elements hostile to the Panth, however, instigated him to his decision. The fact remains that Sikhism was a threat to both, the practitioners of Brahminism – an ideology the Sikh Gurūs condemned, and to the Mughal state that was increasingly becoming intolerant of non-Semitic faiths. It may be stated that Jahangir was not religious and had even considered converting to Christianity at one time, so the threat came from others instigating him.

Later, under the influence of Hazrat Mīrān Mīr (ਹਜ਼ਰਤ ਮੀਰਾਂ ਮੀਰ), Jahāṅgīr even tried to correct his mistaken ways. Eventually, he became friends with Gurū Hargobind, the Sixth Nānak. Candū's role in Gurū Arjan's martyrdom is a certainty when one looks at his own execution at the hands of the Sikhs after Jahāṅgīr handed him over to Gurū Hargobind. "According to the Sikh traditional accounts, Candū was handed over to the Gurū [Hargobind] for torturing Gurū Arjan and met a sad end at the hands of Sikh *sangat*." Gurū Hargobind would have never allowed this to happen if Candū were not responsible.

Sabad

ਮਾਝ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ਚਉਪਦੇ ਘਰੁ ੧ ॥
 ਮੇਰਾ ਮਨੁ ਲੋਚੈ ਗੁਰ ਦਰਸਨ ਤਾਈ ॥ ਬਿਲਪ ਕਰੇ ਚਾਤ੍ਰਕ ਕੀ ਨਿਆਈ ॥
 ਤ੍ਰਿਖਾ ਨ ਉਤਰੈ ਸਾਂਤਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਬਿਨੁ ਦਰਸਨ ਸੰਤ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਜੀਉ ॥੧॥
 ਹਉ ਘੋਲੀ ਜੀਉ ਘੋਲਿ ਘੁਮਾਈ ਗੁਰ ਦਰਸਨ ਸੰਤ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਜੀਉ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
 ਤੇਰਾ ਮੁਖੁ ਸੁਹਾਵਾ ਜੀਉ ਸਹਜ ਧੁਨਿ ਬਾਣੀ ॥ ਚਿਰੁ ਹੋਆ ਦੇਖੇ ਸਾਰਿੰਗਪਾਣੀ ॥
 ਧੰਨੁ ਸੁ ਦੇਸੁ ਜਹਾ ਤੂੰ ਵਸਿਆ ਮੇਰੇ ਸਜਣ ਮੀਤ ਮੁਰਾਰੇ ਜੀਉ ॥੨॥
 ਹਉ ਘੋਲੀ ਹਉ ਘੋਲਿ ਘੁਮਾਈ ਗੁਰ ਸਜਣ ਮੀਤ ਮੁਰਾਰੇ ਜੀਉ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
 ਇਕ ਘੜੀ ਨ ਮਿਲਤੇ ਤਾ ਕਲਿਜੁਗੁ ਹੋਤਾ ॥ ਹੁਣਿ ਕਦਿ ਮਿਲੀਐ ਪ੍ਰਿਅ ਤੁਧੁ ਭਗਵੰਤਾ ॥
 ਮੋਹਿ ਰੈਣਿ ਨ ਵਿਹਾਵੈ ਨੀਦ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਬਿਨੁ ਦੇਖੇ ਗੁਰ ਦਰਬਾਰੇ ਜੀਉ ॥੩॥
 ਹਉ ਘੋਲੀ ਜੀਉ ਘੋਲਿ ਘੁਮਾਈ ਤਿਸੁ ਸਚੇ ਗੁਰ ਦਰਬਾਰੇ ਜੀਉ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
 ਭਾਗੁ ਹੋਆ ਗੁਰਿ ਸੰਤੁ ਮਿਲਾਇਆ ॥ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਅਬਿਨਾਸੀ ਘਰ ਮਹਿ ਪਾਇਆ ॥
 ਸੇਵ ਕਰੀ ਪਲੁ ਚਸਾ ਨ ਵਿਛੜਾ ਜਨ ਨਾਨਕ ਦਾਸ ਤੁਮਾਰੇ ਜੀਉ ॥੪॥
 ਹਉ ਘੋਲੀ ਜੀਉ ਘੋਲਿ ਘੁਮਾਈ ਜਨ ਨਾਨਕ ਦਾਸ ਤੁਮਾਰੇ ਜੀਉ ॥੧॥੮॥

mājh mahalā 5

My mind longs for the vision of the Gurū's Darshan. It cries out like the thirsty song-bird.
 My thirst remains unquenched, and I can't find peace without seeing the Beloved Saint. ||1||
I am a sacrifice, my soul is a sacrifice, to the Vision of the Beloved Saint-Gurū. ||1||Pause||
 Your Face is Beautiful, and the Your Words impart intuitive wisdom. It's been so long since
 this rainbird has had a glimpse of water.
 My intimate friend, wherever you live is holy. 2||
I am a sacrifice, I am forever a sacrifice, to my Intimate Friend and Divine Gurū. ||1||Pause||
 When I could not be with You for just one moment, arkeness engulfed me.
 When will I meet You, O my Beloved? I can't endure the night and I can't sleep without the
 Sight of the Beloved Gurū's Court. ||3||
I am a sacrifice, my soul is a sacrifice, to that True Court of the Beloved Gurū. ||1||Pause||
 By good fortune, I have met the Saint Gurū. I have found the Immortal within my own self.
 I will now serve You forever, and I shall never be separated from You, even for an instant.
 Servant Nānak is Your slave, O Beloved Master. ||4||
I am a sacrifice, my soul is a sacrifice; servant Nānak is Your slave, Lord. ||Pause||1||8||

- Gurū Arjan, Rāg Mājh, Gurū Granth Sāhib, p. 96