

The First Reader of the Word – Babā Buḍḍhā

The tradition of reciting and singing the revelations of the Gurūs in congregations began during the time of the first *Nānak*. Gurū Arjan, the fifth *Nānak*, canonized the revelations in order to provide the congregations with authentic material from which they would take inspiration and continue the recitation and singing. In 1604 CE upon the completion of the compilation of the *Ādi Gurū Granth*, Gurū Arjan chose a Sikh to carry the Holy Volume for the first *prakāsh* ceremony in the *Harimandir Sāhib* and preside as its first *Granthī* (reader and custodian). Who, other than Babā Buḍḍhā, the epitome of Sikh discipleship, could have been worthy of such an honor?



Babā Buḍḍhā (1506-1631 C.E.) was a contemporary of the first six Gurūs; his Gurū-inspired character of humility and grace and his passion for service and welfare of the community shine like a beacon across centuries. Gurū Nānak named him Buḍḍhā at the age of twelve seeing in him an insight as deep as ancient wisdom. Thus began a relationship of disciple and Master that lasted for approximately 100 years.

In the words of Prof. Puran Singh:

“...No heroic woman ever loved man more passionately than Bābā Buḍḍhā jī loved Gurū Nanak.... the finding of a treasure by a poor man might give him a foretaste of paradise; the poet may feel inspired for a rare moment at the sight of the beautiful universe, but nothing comes near the grandeur of the sublime passion of Bhai Buddha who lives like a whole universe in himself... Bhai Buddha is burning like a lamp at

the altar of Gurū Nanak. Silent burning is the only artistic expression of such an infinite kind of disciple-personality – such was the reaction of Bhai Buddha towards Gurū Nanak.”

Babā Buḍḍhā presided over the *gurgadī* (coronation) ceremony of five Gurūs. When certain detractors of the Sikh community forced Gurū Amardās into a temporary exile in Goindvāl, it was Babā Buḍḍhā’s courage that deterred them and allowed for the safe return of the Gurū. Not only was he foremost among Sikhs in his understanding of and devotion to *bāṇī* but he

was a master *par excellence* in the arts of horsemanship and *shastar vidyā* in which he trained the young Gurū Hargobind.

Such was the respect and blessings showered on Babā Buḍḍhā by the Sikh community and the Sikh Gurūs themselves that at his passing, Gurū Hargobind himself carried the bier and lit the funeral pyre. Bhāī Gurdās participated in the reading of the *Ādi Gurū Granth* and conducted the final *ardās*.

Babā Buḍḍhā was the first *Granthī* in time and remains the standard to which all *Granthīs* still aspire.