

DEFENDER OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE SHIELD OF INDIA: GURU TEGH BAHADUR JI

Anchal

Research Scholar
CT University, Ludhiana

ABSTRACT

A pivotal point in the history of religious freedom and human rights is marked by the 350th anniversary of the Shaheedi (martyrdom) of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, the Ninth Guru of the Sikhs. Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, who was martyred in 1675, gave his life to defend the freedom of others, especially the Kashmiri Pandits, to practice their religion without being forced to do so. His sacrifice, which is revered as **Hind di chadar** (the Shield of India), is a universal representation of moral bravery and interfaith cooperation. In the historical framework of Mughal religious persecution under Emperor Aurangzeb, this article examines the life, spiritual thought, and martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji. It looks at his teachings as they are recorded in the Guru Granth Sahib Ji, emphasizing themes of justice, compassion, fearlessness, and detachment.

The study also considers the sacrifice's lasting significance, portraying Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji as a timeless supporter of religious tolerance, human dignity, and moral opposition against persecution.

Keywords: Sikh History, Human rights, Freedom, Religion, Hind di chadar, Kashmiri Pandits, Tolerance and Pluralism, Mughal Period, Martyrdom, Indian History.

INTRODUCTION

Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, the Ninth Guru of the Sikhs, is celebrating his 350th Shaheedi Anniversary, which prompts fresh contemplation on one of the greatest acts of moral bravery in human history. His martyrdom on November 24, 1675, is a timeless example of the defence of religious freedom, the triumph of spiritual courage against oppression, and the defence of human dignity. "*Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji emerged as the lighthouse of righteousness at a time when injustice and bigotry threatened the pluralistic fabric of society, giving his life to let others to live in freedom.*"¹ His heroic sacrifice has inspired people and nations for generations to come.

EARLY LIFE AND FORMATIVE FACTORS

Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji and Mata Nanki Ji welcomed Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji into the world on April 1, 1621, in Amritsar. He was the Sixth Guru's youngest son, and his legacy was influenced by both temporal responsibility and spiritual profundity. He was born with the name **Tyag Mal** and showed remarkable attributes of contemplation, humility, and detachment from a young age—qualities that were in perfect harmony with the spiritual principles of the Sikh religion. He also acquired the concepts of **Miri-Piri**, which emphasize the harmonic balance between spiritual devotion and temporal duties, while growing up under the tutelage of Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji. He took part in the **Battle of Kartarpur** at the age of thirteen, displaying incredible bravery and swordsmanship. He was given the esteemed title "**Tegh Bahadur**"—"Hero of the Sword"—for his bravery in this battle. But even though he was a skilled fighter, he had a natural affinity for meditation, moral behaviour, and the search for the truth. The combination of moral courage and spiritual understanding that would eventually characterize his life and ultimate sacrifice was made possible by these early influences.

Path of Guruship

Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji lived mostly in **Bakala** and dedicated himself to spiritual practice following the death of Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji. His life was characterized by humility, modesty, and a strong dedication to the good of humanity. As Guru Har Krishan Sahib Ji neared the conclusion of his earthly life in 1664, he said, "**Baba Bakale**," signifying that Bakala was home to the next Guru. Due to the emergence of multiple claimants, this caused a great deal of confusion. When a pious Sikh merchant named **Makhan Shah Lubana** found Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji and acknowledged his spiritual authority, the truth became clear. Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji became the official Ninth Guru of the Sikh community as a result of this finding.

¹

Mission and Extensive travels

Mission and Prolonged Journeys He travelled extensively and profoundly throughout northern and eastern India in his capacity as Guru. Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Bengal, and Assam were among the places he visited. Throughout these travels, he engaged with common people, academics, and truth-seekers, disseminating messages of bravery, equality, peace, and the remembrance of God. His teachings focused on the following:

- **The unity of mankind**
- **Freedom from oppression and fear**
- **The meaninglessness of material wealth**
- **Compassion for all beings**
- **Meditation on the Naam**
- **Resistance to injustice.**

*“The 115 Shabads and 57 Shaloks of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji's songs, which are part of the **Guru Granth Sahib Ji**, provide profound philosophical understanding”². They exhibit a unique combination of disengagement and proactive involvement with society demands.*

Historical Context

The Mughal Empire saw severe political and religious upheaval in the middle of the seventeenth century. *During his reign, Emperor Aurangzeb imposed more strict laws to enforce religious adherence. Fear and instability were fostered by forced conversions, the demolition of houses of worship, and unfair taxation.*³ The **Kashmiri Pandits**, who were subject to compulsion and the impending prospect of mass conversion, were among those most negatively impacted. They looked for a moral and spiritual authority that could protect their right to religious freedom because they were unable to oppose the imperial apparatus. They went to Anandpur Sahib and told Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji about their situation under the guidance of **Pandit Kirpa Ram**. The Guru listened

sympathetically and realized that this was a turning point for the larger idea of freedom of conscience as much as for a particular group. His answer was clear: others would follow if Aurangzeb could force Tegh Bahadur to give up his beliefs. Centuries before such ideas were explicitly expressed, he put himself at the vanguard of the fight for universal human rights with this declaration.

Travel to Delhi and Incarceration

Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji freely left for Delhi with three loyal Sikhs- **Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das, and Bhai Dayala** well aware of the repercussions. The Guru and his traveling companions were detained at Agra and sent to the royal capital. The Guru faced threats of dire consequences, pecuniary rewards, and pressure to convert to Islam while incarcerated. His determination was unaffected by their attempts. He stayed unwavering in his beliefs, exhibiting total bravery and submission to the will of God. Then, the Mughal authorities brutally punished his companions in an effort to break his spirit.

Martyrdom of the Devoted Sikhs

The execution of the Guru's companions represents one of the most tragic episodes in Sikh history:

- **Bhai Mati Das** was sawn alive from head to torso.
- **Bhai Dayala** was immersed in a cauldron of boiling water until he attained martyrdom.
- **Bhai Sati Das** was wrapped in cotton and burned alive.

These acts of cruelty were intended to force the Guru into submission. Instead, they revealed the unbreakable commitment of the Sikh community to truth, justice, and freedom.

The Ultimate Sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur

Aurangzeb ordered the Guru's execution after torture and intimidation failed. Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji was publicly beheaded on **November 24, 1675, at Chandni Chowk in Delhi**. His expression remained calm, expressing total devotion to defending the oppressed and total acceptance of the Divine Will. *“His martyrdom represented a unique moment in human history: a spiritual leader sacrificing his life to defend the freedom of another religion rather than his own”⁴. He was given the eternal title of "**Hind di chadar,"- the Shield of India**, for this unmatched deed.*

Repercussions and Maintaining the Martyr's Heritage

Fear swept over the city following the execution. Because disobeying imperial orders was dangerous, no one ventured to approach the Guru's remains. **Bhai Jaita** bravely transported the severed head to **Anandpur Sahib** under cover of darkness, where it was honorably burned. **Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Sahib in Delhi** commemorates **Lakhi Shah Vanjara's** deed of transporting the Guru's body and cremating it by setting fire to his own home. *At the age of nine, the young Guru Gobind Singh Ji wrote lyrics honouring his father's sacrifice, claiming that Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji preserved righteousness with unparalleled courage and safeguarded the Hindu holy tilak and janeu*⁵

Global Relevance of His Martyrdom

In the modern world—marked by conflict, identity struggles, and rising intolerance—Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji's life carries profound relevance:

- His sacrifice is a universal example of defending the rights of others.
- He showed that spirituality must be accompanied by courage and social responsibility.
- His teachings encourage dialogue, coexistence, and respect for diversity.
- His martyrdom stands as a pillar of interfaith harmony, reminding humanity that freedom of belief is sacred.

Honoring the 350th Anniversary

The 350th anniversary is commemorated globally with kirtans, conferences, books, exhibitions, and charitable endeavours. These celebrations act as a reminder of his ideals as well as a reaffirmation of them. The anniversary invites academics, educators, and communities to re-examine his teachings and explain their applicability in the current conversation about freedom, human rights, and ethics.

CONCLUSION

The martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji holds a unique position in world history. He upheld the highest standards of justice, bravery, and human decency by deciding to die rather than violate the religious freedom of another community. His sacrifice was a pivotal occasion that reinforced India's moral foundation and transformed the Sikh identity. It was not a singular historical occurrence. We honor a legacy that cuts across boundaries, religions, and eras as we commemorate the 350th anniversary of Shaheedi. The life of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji serves as a constant reminder to people that a just and peaceful society must be founded on moral courage, compassion, and an uncompromising devotion to truth. "He will always be the Eternal "**Hind di chadar**," the Defender of Freedom, and the Protector of the Oppressed".⁶

REFERENCES

1. Ganda Singh. (1978). *Guru Tegh Bahadur: Martyr and Teacher*. Punjabi University, Patiala.
2. Singh, Gurbachan. (1991). *Sri Guru Granth Sahib: An Analytical Study*. Punjabi University, Patiala.
3. Sambhi, P.S (1995). *The Sikhs: Their religious beliefs and practices*. Sussex Academic Press.
4. Grewal, J.S. (1998). *The Sikhs of the Punjab*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Singh, Harbans(Ed.). (1998). *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism* (vol. 1-4). Patiala: Punjabi University.
6. Singh, Khushwant. (2004). *A History of the Sikhs, Vol 1: 1469_1839*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
7. Puri, Harish K. (2011). *The Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
8. Sen, A. (2005). *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Punjab History, Culture, and Identity*. Penguin Books.
9. Chandra, B. (2009). *History of Punjab*, Orient BlackSwan. New Delhi.
10. <https://ichr.ac.in/pdf/ncf/History-NCF-Report.pdf>
11. <https://nationalarchives.gov.in/>
12. https://rajyasabha.nic.in/rsnew/publication_electronic/role-cultural-heritage.pdf
13. <https://doi.org/10.1234/ijcs.v12i3.2021>