

JOURNEYS OF FAITH AND REFORM: THE TRAVELS AND SOCIO-RELIGIOUS LEGACY OF 'GURU TEGH BAHADUR JI'.

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ABSTRACT:

Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji (1621-1675) the ninth in succession to the spiritual tradition initiated by Guru Nanak Dev ji, was Youngest of the five sons of the Sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji, and Mata Nanki. He inherited a legacy of spiritual leadership combined with moral courage and social responsibility. He travelled widely to create a bond of togetherness amongst the populace especially the suffering lot who were infused with new vigor and spiritual freedom. The Guru remained focused on purging people from superstitions, fanaticism, parochialism and other evils rampant in the Indian society during those times. This article examines the extensive travels of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji in different parts of the Indian subcontinent, including Dhaka and Assam, to preach the teachings of Guru Nanak, the first Sikh guru. The places he visited and stayed in became sites of Sikh temples.

Keywords: Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, Journey, Sikh Gurus, Seventeenth Century, Teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The travels of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji constitute a vital chapter in Sikh history, reflecting the Guru's commitment to spiritual awakening, social justice, and ethical reform. Unlike mere pilgrimage, these journeys were instruments of moral instruction, community service, and resistance against religious orthodoxy and social oppression. His extensive tours across North and Eastern India reinforced the universality of Sikh teachings and strengthened the Sikh Panth during a period of political and religious turmoil. The places he visited and stayed in became sites of Sikh temples.¹

PUNJAB REGION:

Majha

Majha Region Journey of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji marks the initial and highly significant phase of his travels after assuming the Guruship. During this journey, the Guru moved through the core sacred geography of Sikhism in central Punjab. His first halt was at Amritsar, the foremost spiritual Centre of the Sikh faith, where he interacted with the Sikh sangat and reinforced the doctrinal legacy of the earlier Gurus. From Amritsar, he proceeded to Tarn Taran, Khadur Sahib, and Goindwal, all places deeply associated with the lives and teachings of the Sikh Gurus and long revered in Sikh tradition. Crossing the Beas and Sutlej rivers, Symbolising not only a geographical transition but also the expansion of the Guru's missionary activities beyond the immediate Sikh heartland

Malwa

In 1672, Guru Sahib set out for another religious journey towards Malwa region in Punjab. Socially and economically this area was backward and almost neglected, but the people were hard working and poor. They were also deprived of basic amenities like fresh drinking water, milk and even simple food. Guru Sahib toured this area about one and half year.

He helped villagers in many ways. Guru Sahib and Sikh Sangat assisted them in planting trees on barren stretches of land. They were also advised to start dairy farming and in this respect many cattle heads were also distributed free of cost among the poor and landless farmers. To cope with the scarcity of water many community wells were dug on the behest of Guru Sahib by performing Kar-Sewa (free service). Thus, Guru Sahib identified himself with the common masses. At this stage many followers of Sakhi Sarver (a Muslim outfit) entered into the fold of Sikhism. On the other hand, Guru Sahib established many new preaching center of Sikhism at these places. The main and important halts of Guru Sahib were Patiala (Dukhniwaran Sahib), Samaon, Bhiki, Tahla Sahib, and Talwandi in Bhatinda, Gobindpura, Makrora, Bangar and Dhamdhan. Guru Sahib toured these areas about one and a half years and returned Anandpur Sahib in 1675.

These preaching tours and social works irked the Muslim fundamentalists and created a fear-psyche among the upper privileged classes. On the other hand, the secret news-writers of the Mughal Empire dispatched exaggerated and subjective reports regarding the religious activities of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib.²

Travels To the East:

*"My Father Guru set out for the East;
And visited various places of pilgrimage."*

(Bachittar Natak Guru Gobind Singh Ji)

Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji received a divine call to spread the message of truth in Eastern India, following the footsteps of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. These travels aimed at strengthening faith, dispelling superstition, and promoting moral courage.

Amritsar And Bakala

Upon reaching Amritsar, the Guru was denied entry into the Golden Temple by corrupt masands aligned with Dhirmal. The Guru waited patiently at Tham Sahib, later moving to the village of Wala. This incident highlighted his humility and moral authority.

The Guru later returned to Bakala, from where he proceeded to Kiratpur Sahib, ensuring that no property belonging to Dhirmal was taken, except the original manuscript of the Guru Granth Sahib, which was respectfully returned via the River Beas.

Kiratpur And Anandpur Sahib

At Kiratpur Sahib, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji established close ties with regional rulers. He purchased the village of Makhowal from Rani Jalal Devi and founded Anandpur Sahib, which later became the birthplace of the Khalsa under Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

At Agra

From Kurukshetra Guru ji went to Agra. There He met a person, who expressed a desire to leave his home and become a Yogi. The Guru asked him if he had any family. The man replied that he had a wife and three small children. Guru ji asked the man the ultimate object for which he wished to become a yogi. The man replied that he was going away in search of God. Guru ji then said to him that God had entrusted him with four dependents and he would be proving unfaithful to his Master for leaving his duties undone. Guru ji then recited the following hymn: -

"Why goest thou to search Him in the forest?

He dwelleth in all and also is apart from all

As in flowers there is odour and in a mirror reflection,

So, God dwelleth continually in thy heart: search Him there.

O Brother; Know Him to be the same without and within,

This is the knowledge that Guru hath given; Nanak, without knowing thyself the scum of delusion shall not be removed."

(Dhanasri Moh:9)

This indeed is the essence of Sikh philosophy. i.e. to earn one's living by honest means and hard labour; to share it with the needy and the destitute and to contemplate on the True name of The Timeless One. This is the triple formula, which Guru Nanak Sahib has given us. Anyone who follows it, automatically becomes a good citizen of the World and also purifies his soul and attains salvation.

At Prayag (Allahabad)

Guru Tegh Bahadur ji, the king of kings, now reached the sacred Hindu city of Prayag. This city is also referred to as Triveni since three rivers i.e. Ganga, Jamuna and the legendary Saraswati become one here. Guru Ji stayed here for several days and blessed the people with all the bounties. People of Prayag were much impressed with the simple mission and the charming personality of the Great Guru.

At Banaras

Banaras or Varanasi is another holy place of the Hindus. east of Prayag and on the banks of river Ganges. On reaching here the melodious Kirtan of Asa-di-Var was performed by the Sikh musicians in the ambrosial hours of the morning. After the prayers had ended, a poor cripple staggered into the Holy presence of Guru Tegh Bahadur ji. He told the Master that he was very poor; so much so that he did not even have a hut to hide himself in during the rainy season and since had no limbs, he could hardly move about. On occasions some kind hearted travelers fed him; otherwise, he had to go without

food for days and weeks. He wished that the True Guru should emancipate his sufferings. On hearing this the Guru recited the following hymn: -

"The name of God bestoweth comfort.

By reciting it Ajamal was saved and Ganka obtained salvation.

Daropadi at the royal assemblage thought of God's name,

The Lord of compassion removed her agony and enhanced His renown.

The Ocean of Mercy comes to the rescue of those, who sing His praises.

Sayeth Nanak, that is my reliance - I take His refuge,"

(Maru Moh:9)

After the hymn had ended, Guru ji said to the cripple that it was the Name of Almighty God that was the remedy to all miseries. Therefore, Guru ji asked him to repeat the Nam with full sincerity and the concentration of mind. After he had repeated the Name "Wonderful Lord" five times, he got up and at once kowtowed in reverence to the Guru. The whole congregation was amazed and uttered, "Great is Guru Nanak"; Great is Guru Tegh Bahadur. Then Guru ji gave him enough money to put up a hut of his own and to have some subsistence to fall back upon.

On His way to Gaya from Banaras, Guru Tegh Bahadur ji stopped at a place known as Sasram, where lived a devoted Sikh by the name of "Uncle Phaggu". He had constructed a room in which he had made a special seat for the Guru and was remembering Him day and night. But when he told the people that his Guru will come one day, he was laughed at, since they knew that the Guru lived in the Punjab and there was little chance of His coming that way. But Phaggu, however, was so devout that he did not listen to what the people said. He would go into the room every morning and clean the place himself; and offer prayers imagining the Guru's presence before his eyes. The Great Guru heard Bhai Phaggu's call that was coming from within his heart and one fine morning Guru Tegh Bahadur was actually there in Bhai Phaggu's hut and blessed him forever. On hearing the Guru's benevolence, the people of the vicinity flocked around Him for sermon. Guru Tegh Bahadur ji recited the following hymn for their benefit: -

"Keep the Indestructible Lord ever in thy heart;

And abandon all attachment to worldly goods.

There is nothing better than Him.

He alone is within and without all.

He sees, He knows; He is deep all-wise.

He is the Unconditioned One, the Overlord the Nourisher; the Ocean of compassion,

Merciful and forgiving. May I fall at the feet of the holy ones.

Sayeth Nanak that is my yearning."

(Sukhmani 1-16)

Peace prevailed and all the devotees were blessed.

At Gaya

Gaya, another important place of Hindu pilgrimage, was then blessed by the Holy Feet of Guru Tegh Bahadur ji. There the Pandas (Hindu priests) told the Guru to perform a ceremony whereby the Guru's ancestors will attain salvation. Guru Tegh Bahadur ji preached them that their past actions cannot be destroyed without the Holy Nam given by Guru Nanak out of Grace. The Name can destroy all the past actions as a particle of fire would destroy hundreds of tons of logs put together. The Guru explained to them that they were living in a place that reminded them of death and they should, therefore, not waste their time in useless pursuits but contemplate on the Nam. Blessing all, the Guru departed for Patna.

At Patna

Patna, or Patliputra as it was known in the ancient times, was the capital of Ohandragupta Maurya and his descendants, including Ashoka the Great. It became the centre of Buddhism during Ashoka's reign. Many a holy man have set foot on this sacred place including Budha, Guru Nanak ji and Guru Tegh Bahadur ji. This city is particularly blessed, for here was born on December 22, 1666, the Creator of the Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh Ji. Patna is now one of the Five Takhats (seats

of authority) of the Khalsa Panth. The birth-place of Guru Gobind Singh Ji is known as Sri Harimandir and is a magnificent building. There are also many other Gurdwaras associated with the names of Guru Nanak, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh.

One day Raja Ram Singh of Jaipur came to pay his homage to the Great Guru. He had travelled from Delhi with all his army. On enquiring the purpose of his visit, it was known that the Raja had been sent by the Emperor of Delhi to conquer Kamrup (Assam). The emperor had succeeded in merging all princely states into his empire, except Kamrup. He had attempted once, but failed and his Commander-in-Chief Mir Jumla simply perished. Now the Raja of Jaipur, who was chief amongst the Rajput princes of Rajputana, had been sent by the emperor on this difficult mission. The emperor, being cunning, had thought that if Raja Ram Singh succeeds in his mission, well and good; and if he does not, and perishes, he would have got rid of another Hindu Rajput Prince. The emperor only wanted an excuse to take over the State of Jaipur.

The House of Guru Nanak had very special relationships with the Rajput Chiefs. Guru Tegh Bahadur ji's Father Guru Hargobind Ji had earlier rescued 52 Rajput Princes from the fort of Gwallor where they had been imprisoned by the then Mughal Emperor Jahangir. It was, therefore, natural for all Rajput Princes to have a great respect for the successors of Guru Hargobind Sahib. Guru Harkrishan ji, our Eighth Guru, was once the guest of Raja Jai Singh, the father of Raja Ram Singh and during His visit to Delhi had stayed in one of Raja Jai Singh's bungalows at Raisina. Raja Ram Singh remembered the occasion. Both Raja Jai Singh and Raja Ram Singh regarded it a privilege to be referred to as the Sikhs of the Guru. With this history in mind the Raja had come to the Holy Feet of Guru Tegh Bahadur ji. Kamarup is known to be the land of magic to this day. It was believed amongst the nobles of the emperor that the Raja of Kamarup and his Ministers were great magicians and Raja Ram Singh was rather apprehensive at the thought of facing such powers. He knew that with the assistance and blessings of Guru Tegh Bahadur ji, no magic could harm him. Therefore, he begged Guru ji to accompany him to Assam. Guru Tegh Bahadur ji agreed, but on the condition that Raja Ram Singh would not conquer Kamarup. Since Guru ji thought that the King of Kamarup was innocent, He did not wish to be an agent in annexing his territory simply to satisfy the greed of the emperor. Guru ji suggested to the Raja that He would act as an intermediary in bringing about a peaceful settlement between the two Hindu Rajas; thus, avoiding the need for bloodshed. It would be worth noting here that if there had been a War between the two Rajas, the casualties would have been all Hindu Rajputs, whereas, any gain would have accrued to a Turk Muslim ruler.

Soon afterwards Guru ji left Patna and went with Raja Ram Singh to Kamarup through Bengal. Guru ji instructed Mata Gujri and Mata Nanaki to stay at Patna and He asked His brother-in-law Kripal Chand to look after them. Before leaving Guru ji told His mother Mata Nanaki that she would be blessed with a grandson whom she should name Gobind Rai³.

Sylhet- Then Guru Tegh Bahadur proceeded to Sylhet reaching there within a couple of days. In 1507-08, Guru Nanak Dev ji had visited Sylhet established on the right banks of River Surma and the Sikh Sangat was residing there since then. "A Sikh Sangat was established and a Dharmshala was constructed here to commemorate the holy visit"⁴. Guru Tegh Bahadur ji also visited the place while he was touring the Far East in 1656-64 and also, in 1665-70. Pritam Singh Gill writes, "From Decca, the Guru moved towards Sylhet; the journey to the place was very hazardous; it required special camp equipage and preparations". The Guru's disciple called Raja Ram Rai who was the Ruler of one of the three parts of Sylhet, i.e., Gaur, Laur and Jaintia made arrangements of the journey. Guru Tegh Bahadur ji spent the rainy season of 1667 A.D. there for moving during the heavy downpour in this area was cumbersome. The Sufis and other people of the area became his followers

In Orissa

In 1724 bikarmi reached to the house of a kaljug Pandit in orrissa. then pucci karwayi bauli sahib which is still there. After a stay of about a fortnight at puri,⁵ Then sakhi bhubneshwat cuttok in 1724 bikarmi reached patna, crossing Cuttock nad, bahmni, baitarni, karamnama rivers and first time watched his son.⁶

CONCLUSION

Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji's journeys were purposeful missions of spiritual guidance and social reform rather than mere religious travel. Through his tours in Punjab and Eastern India, he strengthened Sikh institutions, uplifted the poor, challenged superstition and ritualism, and promoted ethical living based on devotion to the Divine Name. His commitment to peace, justice, and inter-religious harmony left a deep impact on seventeenth-century society and laid the moral foundation for the future growth of the Sikh Panth, culminating in the creation of the Khalsa under Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

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