

## LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF GURU TEG BAHADUR WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS BAANI

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### ABSTRACT

Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–1675), occupies a distinctive place in Indian religious and moral history for his profound spiritual teachings and his supreme sacrifice in defense of human freedom. The teachings of Guru Teg Bahadur are marked by philosophical depth and existential clarity. Central to his thought is the impermanence of the phenomenal world and the instability of the human mind, which remains entangled in fear, desire, and attachment. He repeatedly warns against identification with the body, wealth, power, and social status, presenting them as obstacles on the path of self-realization. True liberation, according to the Guru, lies in *naam simran*, constant remembrance of the Divine, combined with detachment, humility, and ethical conduct. He expounds the ideal of *jiwan mukti*, liberation while living, attainable through inner discipline and unwavering devotion, even while fully participating in worldly life. Rejecting ritualism, dogmatism, and outward displays of religiosity, Guru Teg Bahadur emphasizes inner purity, equanimity in joy and sorrow, and fearlessness rooted in God-consciousness. His life and teachings together articulate a universal vision of spirituality that unites inner realization with social responsibility. In this way, Guru Teg Bahadur emerges not only as a spiritual master and poet but also as a moral exemplar whose message continues to inspire humanity toward truth, freedom, and spiritual liberation.

**Key words:** Tyag mal, Gurmat Gyan, Bani, Kartarpur, tyranny, hymns, detachment, Absolute truth, eternal, omnipotent, transcendent, compassionate, maya, Sagun, Nirgun, ignorance, Mukti.

### INTRODUCTION

History abounds with accounts of martyrs who were arrested and then executed by the very powers they opposed in the cause of righteousness. The martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur stands apart even in this context, as he willingly journeyed from Anandpur to Delhi.<sup>2</sup> He laid down his life to protect the oppressed, the downtrodden, and the suffering masses who were powerless before the might of the Mughal Empire. This act was truly unparalleled in human history, for here was a man making the supreme sacrifice for the protection of a faith and its principles that were not his own.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, the life, mission, and teachings of Guru Tegh Bahadur remain profoundly relevant even in contemporary times. This article aims to highlight some of his views on the various dimensions of life and teachings.

In the house of the sixth Sikh Guru, Hargobind and mother Nanaki, the boy Tyag Mal was born on 18 April, 1621 C.E at Amritsar. From his childhood, he was trained in swordsmanship, horse riding, Gurmat Gyan and *bani*. He earned the title “Teg Bahadur” (brave wielder of the sword) for his exemplary courage in the Battle of Kartarpur. He travelled extensively to Bihar, Bengal, Assam, and Utter Pradesh to guide people towards a life of righteousness. He strongly opposed casteism, discrimination and religious intolerance.

He was bestowed with the *Gurgaddi* on April 7, 1664. During these days, Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb adopted harsh policies with the aim of converting India into Dar-ul-Islam. Guru Tegh Bahadur raised his voice against this tyranny and firmly upheld the principle of religious freedom. In May 1675, a group of 16 Kashmiri Pandits visited Anandpur Sahib seeking his help. They narrated the atrocities committed by Mughal officials and requested Guru Sahib to protect their religious rights. Guru Teg Bahadur decided to defend the oppressed and ultimately sacrificed his life in Delhi in November 11, 1675. Three devoted Sikhs, Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das, and Bhai Dayal Das also sacrificed their lives with Guru Teg Bahadur.<sup>4</sup>

Guru Tegh Bahadur composed 116 hymns and 57 couplets those preserved in the Guru Granth Sahib (the sacred scripture of the Sikhs), in various musical measures. Though limited in quantity, it is profound in depth and meaning, speaking directly to the heart. In his hymns, Guru Tegh Bahadur reflects on the illusory nature of human desires and material attachments. Yet, far from causing despair, these compositions have offered spiritual comfort and solace to millions in times of personal sorrow and suffering. His verses deepen our awareness of the transient nature of worldly existence while uplifting the human spirit and instilling hope. Through his teachings, we are guided beyond the immediate trials of life and encouraged to focus our consciousness on the eternal and everlasting.

In Guru Tegh Bahadur’s philosophical vision, the fundamental concern is the distinction between absolute Truth and relative truth. Guru Tegh Bahadur ji teaches that understanding God and realizing the Ultimate Reality is extremely difficult, for God is wondrous and His ways are beyond comprehension. As the Creator, He manifests the world in

countless forms and can instantly reverse human conditions, raising the lowly and humbling the powerful. He has created and pervaded the world with *maya*, yet remains its witness. Though present throughout creation as the One, non-dual Reality, He is also transcendent, infinite, and immaculate, and the reasons and modes of His actions remain beyond human understanding.<sup>5</sup> According to the Guru Teg Bahadur, while looking at the creation of the Creator, the human being should realize and remember the oneness in the diversity of His creation. The Reality is transcendent and immanent in His creation at the same time because He Himself is the source of this creation, He has created the whole expanse from Himself and He resides in the creation and also resides within the human being as the image in the mirror.<sup>6</sup> He is Benevolent, Compassionate, Gracious and bestows His compassion and grace on all His devotees. According to the Guru there is no difference between God and His devotees.<sup>7</sup> Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib very strongly recommends that the person alone is emancipated who has contemplated God, there is no difference between such a person and God, know it to be true.<sup>8</sup>

God is the Protector, the Liberator of all, annuls all suffering, sins and fear. He is the fulfiller of all desires.<sup>9</sup> Guru Teg Bahadur further said that wife, friends, children, carriages, property, total wealth, the entire world - know that all of these things are illusory (unreal). The Lord's meditation alone is eternal (real).<sup>10</sup>

Humans have been staring up into space for thousands of generations to have a rational and coherent description for the universe's creation and evolution. Guru Teg Bahadur offers an elegant explanation of the origin and creation of the universe. His views strongly align with the worldview of his predecessor, Gurus. He said "Holy Ones! God has fashioned the creation."<sup>11</sup> The Guru proclaims that the Creator is the primal cause for the existence of the creation. It has both the *sargun* (manifested) and *nirgun* (unmanifested) forms. The diversity of specie, colours, and other phenomena is its manifested form. He spreads out the expanse of his creation (*maya*) and beholds it. He assumes so many forms and colours and plays so many games yet remains detached from it all.<sup>12</sup> Describing the continuous process of production and destruction in the creation, the Guru proclaims; as the bubbles in the water well up and disappear again, says Nanak, listen, O my friend! so is the universe created;<sup>13</sup> Guru Teg Bahadur asserts that all this is happening under the natural laws (divine will) set by the Creator. Says Nanak, listen, mind: whatever pleases God comes to pass.<sup>14</sup> The ultimate fate of the creation is a mind-bogglingly thing to think about. So what's the outcome for it all? Guru Teg Bahadur dares to predict the end of the creation. He enunciates that in the furthest reaches of time, it will be the end not only of life but everything that's ever existed. No more matter, light, particles, or anything. It's a distressing reality to fathom, but it's one we need to reckon with. Talking about the end of creation, he articulates; Everything that has been created will be destroyed; nothing will remain.<sup>15</sup>

God being the source of the whole origin, it is the purpose of human life to realize the source of his origin, to realize the Light residing within. Guru Teg Bahadur emphasized that the purpose of human life is self-realization, recognizing one's divine origin and uniting with God. He describes this as a difficult path because it is obstructed by vices such as ego, lust, anger, attachment, greed, and bad company, which distract the mind. To progress smoothly on this path, these obstacles must be eradicated. Only a purified mind can attain realization. Along with overcoming these vices, one should meditate on the Divine Name and remain detached from pleasure and pain, honor and dishonor, joy and sorrow, praise and blame.

In Sikhism, from a spiritual viewpoint, whatever is perishable and changeable is illusory, being a projection of Nature. Attachment to such impermanent things leads to suffering through attraction and aversion. The human body, along with the mind and senses, is merely a physical formation and not the true self. Identifying the body as the real self is a delusion arising from mental impurities. According to Sikh world view the human body like universe comprises the five classical elements and Guru Teg Bahadur expresses such a view in his bani as; O, Wise One! Know it well that your body is a build-up of the five elements. Nanak says: It is a fact that you shall merge again into the same, from whom you had originated.<sup>16</sup> He again said, the human body is impermanent (false) because it is perishable, subject to decay, sickness, and death. He articulates: You believed that this body was permanent, but it shall turn to dust.<sup>17</sup> Your body is like a hail-stone; it melts away in no time at all.<sup>18</sup> He teaches that accepting the mind and body as real causes bondage and rebirth, and that worldly attachments distance one from the true Self—the divine essence within. Having been in the grip of sexual desire, anger, and emotional attachment, mortal beings have forgotten God, the Immortal Being. The body is temporary, but they believe it to be eternal; it is like a dream in the night".<sup>19</sup>

The Guru asserts that a person should look beyond the human body to experience oneness with the real Self, or the divine essence (God), which is hidden in all. Thereby, in his hymns, he urges that one must cultivate detachment towards one's body and try to merge in God, which is real, eternal, and indestructible. He further says, O Wise Ones! Know that this body is false. Recognize that the Lord God, who dwells within it, is real, alone.<sup>20</sup>

Guruji said, we should have a sound knowledge of life, and this knowledge should enable us to lead an authentic life on this planet. "Know Thyself" and never forget your innate divinity". He proclaims; Devotee Nanak says: Without knowing oneself, the delusion (ignorance) is not removed.<sup>21</sup> The Guru teaches that although the human body is illusory, it can still become a means to liberation (*mukti*). By controlling the body and mind, acting without desire or attachment, restraining

passions, and constantly focusing on the real Self—the divine essence—while performing daily duties with detachment, a person can attain true liberation, eternal peace, and freedom from the cycle of birth and death. He articulates: You shall not obtain this human body again; make an effort and try to achieve liberation.<sup>22</sup> To achieve liberation, Guru Tegh Bahadur urges us to seek the sanctuary of God. In this Age, liberation comes from the love of God (Naam). The Guru has revealed this secret.<sup>23</sup> The Guru proclaims that to lead an authentic life, one must imbibe the love of God in one's life. The Guru says a life becomes fruitful only when imbued with God's love (leading a virtuous life).<sup>24</sup>

Guru Tegh Bahadur emphasizes the importance of Guru in his *bani*. He says, without imbuing the love of God in one's life, one experiences only disquietude and without devotional worship, duality is not dispelled; the Guru reveals this secret.<sup>25</sup> The way of God is to love Him and the Guru has inspired the human being to love the Almighty whole heartedly, to attach oneself fully to God. Guru Tegh Bahadur also urges us to join the holy company to enhance our contemplation on God. He says, O mind! Love the Lord. Listen to the glorious praises of the Lord and sing His eulogies. Join the holy company and meditate on the Lord; in doing so, even a sinner can become a saint.<sup>26</sup> The Guru proclaims that the company of the holy persons helps in dispelling evil-mindedness. Whenever one comes to the sanctuary of the Holy Saints, one's all evil-mindedness is dispelled and by remembering the God, the noose of death gets snapped.<sup>27</sup>

The human mind holds great importance in the *bani* of Guru Teg Bahadur. He explains that the human mind is restless and difficult to control. Mere human effort, rituals, or force cannot discipline it. Guru Sahib teaches that the true mastery of the mind is possible only through divine grace, remembrance of Naam, and guidance of the Guru. He highlights that inner struggle with the mind is universal and that spiritual peace comes through surrender to the Divine rather than ego-based control.<sup>28</sup> It is further opined by him that the mind is so self-willed that it does not listen to good counsel or advice and is not restrained from evil thinking. It deceives the world by fraud and serve its own interests. The Guru has compared the condition of mind with dog's tail which always remains crooked.<sup>29</sup> The only way to control mind, to put it on the right track is to control the evil propensities which distract the mind and meditate on the Name Divine in the holy congregation. He further gently reminds the seeker that the Divine is not to be discovered by retreating into forests or pursuing external forms of renunciation. God abides within the human heart itself. He emphasized that true spirituality lies in inner realization, self-awareness, and constant remembrance of the Divine Name, rather than in outward wandering or ascetic practices. By turning inward and purifying the mind, one realizes the ever-present Divine and attains true peace.<sup>30</sup>

To the question put by Guru Tegh Bahadur ji himself that what is the Name Divine and how to achieve the devotion to God and remove the fear of death, Guru himself answers that the Name of God which is the ocean of grace may only bring the liberation. No other act of piety is equal to Name.<sup>31</sup> God resides within the human being as fragrance in the rose, reflection in the mirror. Realize the self and without realization impurity of illusion is not removed. The real yogic praxis is to eradicate the ego, avarice, attachment etc. from the mind. A true yogi does not bother about the praise or flattery; gold and iron are equal to a true yogi, joy and sorrow are alike and he has made his mind poised and restrained.<sup>32</sup> In Sikh thought, liberation is conceived as *jiwan mukti*, a state that can be realized while one continues to live and act in the world. Guru Tegh Bahadur ji refers to this condition as *mukat*, *jiwan mukat*, or *nirbhai pad*. According to him, this state is attained through sustained meditation on the Divine Name, for self-realization is inseparable from remembrance of God. The *jiwan mukat* is characterized by equanimity and inner freedom: such a person remains unaffected by pleasure and pain, praise and censure, greed, attachment, and ego. For the liberated individual, conventional dualities—such as gold and iron, joy and sorrow, friend and foe—lose their binding force. Free from fear and incapable of instilling fear in others, the *jiwan mukat* embodies the divine ideal and actively assists others on the path of realization and liberation.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's notion of *vairag* is often misconstrued as advocating renunciation in the conventional sense found in certain Indian religious traditions. In reality, it denotes a state of transcendence rather than withdrawal from the world. It involves remaining inwardly detached from passions and worldly entanglements while responsibly discharging one's social and moral obligations and maintaining a deep concern for the welfare of humanity as a whole. This synthesis of transcendence and universal responsibility ultimately found its highest expression in Guru Tegh Bahadur ji's martyrdom, undertaken to defend the fundamental right of individuals to practice their own faith, even when that faith was not his own.

In the last, we can say that Guru Teg Bahadur's life and teachings present a profound synthesis of spiritual depth, moral courage and universal human values. He emphasized inner detachment, mastery over the restless mind, and remembrance of the Divine Name as the path to liberation while living. He did not reject life, while fully aware of the transitory nature of the world rather, he taught balanced life, where one remains engaged in worldly duties without becoming enslaved by them. His teachings consistently stress fearlessness, humility, compassion and equanimity amid pleasure and pain. Above all, his supreme sacrifice stands as an eternal testimony to his ideals.

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