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REMEMBERING THE 99th AD DHARM FOUNDATION DAY JUNE 11-12

Prem Kumar Chumber

(Editor-in-Chief: Ambedkar Times & Desh Doaba)

Varna-based Caste system which divided Hindu society into Brahmin, Kshtriya, Vaishya, Shudra and the fifth unsaid category of Ati-Shudras led to the historical denial of human rights of the Scheduled Castes variously nomenclatured as panchamas, achhuts, dheds, pariahs, Harijans and Dalits. These large number of avarna (outside of the Varna division) people were condemned to live in segregated localities in the periphery of villages throughout India without having any share in the land holdings and the local structures of power. They were forced to perform 'begar' hard manual labor without any remuneration. If the men folk had to work in the agricultural farms of the landlords, their women folk were pushed into an equally hard work of cleaning the cowsheds of the landlords. Scheduled Castes were not allowed to possess land, weapons, valuable metals and milch castles. They were only allowed to keep the beasts of burden to assist them in performing the hard manual labor without any payments in return.

Tathagat Gautam Buddha raised a revolutionary voice against this cruel system of extreme denial of human rights based on low birth. He welcomed the Ati-Shudras into his Sanghas and treated them equal without any prejudice whatsoever. After a long gap and with the advent of Sikh faith in Punjab, once again a serious attempt was made to remove the deadly caste boundaries from the Hindu society while spreading the message of unity of mankind. It was in Punjab, the sacred land of Gurus and Pirs, that on June 11-12, 1926 the first mammoth annual function of the Ad Dharm movement was organized in the native village of Ghadri Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, the founder of the Ad Dharm in Punjab in 1925 after his return from USA where he reached in 1909 and became one of the pioneers of the Gadhar Movement. It was at this mammoth Ad Dharm conference where he publicly announced the launch of tirade against the pernicious system of untouchability and the restoration of the lost glory of the indigenous people of Bharat.

Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia exhorted his people to get organized and say definitive no to caste discrimination and social segregation. He called upon his people to live with self-respect and dignity and started the movement for equal rights of the Dalits. He approached the then British rulers to empower the Depressed Classes (at that time the term Scheduled Castes was not coined nor the term Harijan had come) while declaring their separate religion of Ad Dharm at par with other mainstream religions of the region. Consequently the British government declared Ad Dharm as a separate religion of the Dalits in Punjab 1931. About 5 lacs Ad Dharmis recorded themselves under this new religion category in the Census of 1931. Under the able and strong leadership of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, the Ad Dharm movement turned party contested the 1937 Punjab Province Assembly Elections and won seven out of eight seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes.

When Ambedkar movement for the annihilation of caste took roots in India, it was the solid groundwork prepared by the Ad Dharm movement in undivided Punjab which helped raise a strong support structure for Babasaheb Dr. B. R Ambedkar who visited Punjab thrice during his life. The forum of "Ambedkar Times" www.ambedkartimes.com takes immense pleasure and proud to congratulate all its readers, contributors and supporters on the auspicious occasion of the 99th anniversary of the first mammoth conference of the Ad Dharm movement held at village Mugowal near Mahilpur in District Hoshiarpur on 11-12 June 1926.

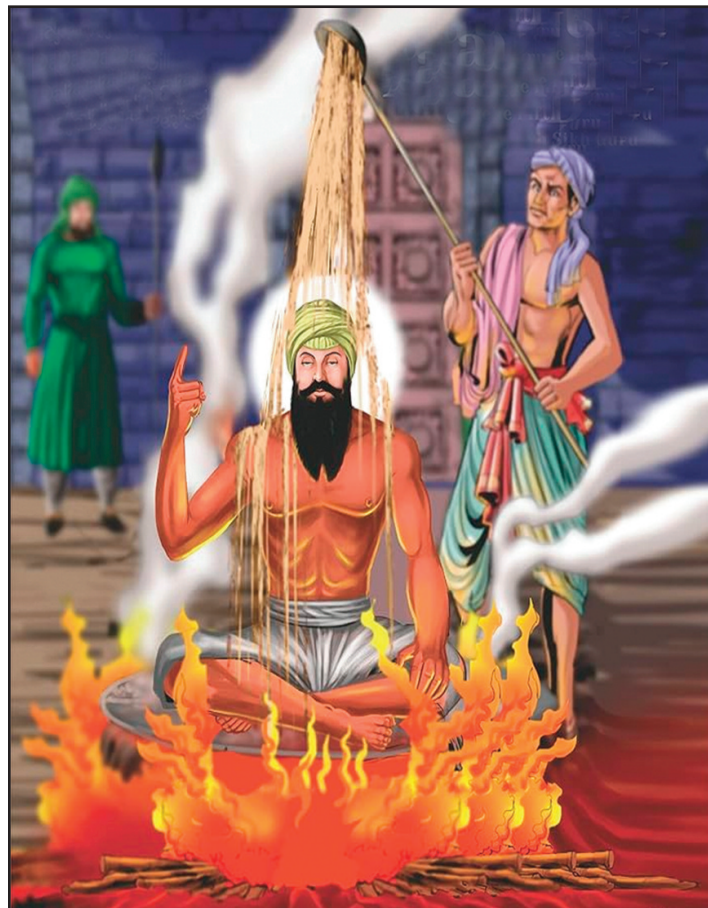
GURU ARJAN: THE EPITOME OF SIKH MARTYRDOM

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GENEALOGY OF MARTYR AND MARTYRDOM

This study, divided into three sections, examines the phenomena of shahid (martyr) and shahadat (martyrdom) in Sikhism in comparison with that of the Abrahamic tradition. It also challenges the skeptical viewpoint that disregards the martyrdom of the fifth Master, Guru Arjan, the epitome of Sikh martyrdom, who had laid down his life for the cause of purity of his faith. Furthermore, it also questions the pejorative portrayal of martyrdom in Sikhism that confines its foundation with the beheading of the ninth Master, Guru Tegh Bahadur, thus undermining the holistic tradition of the valorous episteme of shahadat in Sikhism. The first section provides a detailed account of the phenomenon of martyrdom as it evolved in the Abrahamic/Semitic tradition over a long period of time. The second section deals with some of the corresponding concepts that were often referred to with regard to the phenomenon of martyrdom/sacrifice in ancient Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism – beyond the Abrahamic tradition. The third section provides an analytical view of the unique phenomenon of martyrdom in Sikhism by distinguishing it from both of the Abrahamic and Hindu traditions. It also critically engages with some of the skeptical viewpoints about the veracity of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan. Sieving through varied narratives and counter-narratives about the martyrdom of the fifth Master, Guru Arjan, this section endorses the popular viewpoint that underlined the martyrdom of Guru Arjan as an exemplar of this valorous tradition in Sikh faith.



who wielded absolute power. The martyrdom of Mansur Al-Hallaj (also spelled as Mansoor al-Hallaj), a Persian mystic, poet, and scholar of Sufism, for his insistence on *Ana 'l-Haqq* – equivalent of a saying in Sanskrit namely *Aham Brahmasmi* – (I am God. I am the ultimate Truth), and that of Shaheed Bhagat Singh who sacrificed his life during the Indian freedom struggle against the oppressive foreign rule of the British Empire are respectively instances of martyrdom for spiritual and terrestrial causes (for details on Mansur Al-Hallaj see: Hitti 1970; Singh, Kirpal 2004:17; Singh 1970). Shams-i-Tabriz, a Persian Shafi'ite poet and spiritual guide of the great philosopher of Sufism, Jalauddin Rumi, though less celebrated, was another great martyr of the Muslim world in the mode of spiritual cause. Martyred by being flayed alive, as popularly known in India, his name was also associated with a popular miracle of bringing down the sun close enough to bake a piece of meat for him (Talib 1999: 222).

I

THE ABRAHAMIC TRADITION

The phenomena of martyr/shahid, and martyrdom/shahidi/ shahadat occupy prominent space in varied socio-religious systems – mainly Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – across civilizational and national fault lines, and usually entail defiance of injustice brought about by the brute force of terrestrial power and always convey "positive meaning for members of a community" (Brass 2006:18). Its origin can be traced to the Greek term 'martus', meaning "a witness who testifies to a fact of which he has knowledge from personal observation" (DeMarco 2002; see also Singh, Harbans 1997: 55; Uberoi 1999: 51). Greek writers in turn were deeply influenced by the sufferings and sacrifices of the Jewish people at the hands of tyrannical Egyptians, Babylonians and such others in their exploration of the concept and phenomenon of martyr and martyrdom. (Talib: 1999: 212). In the grammar of martyriology, the term 'witness' is qualified by its closeness with the 'cause' for which the martyr in question sacrificed his/her life rather than the very suffering or punishment s/he underwent. It is in this con-

text that a martyr becomes 'witness' in sanctification of the name of God and undergoes torture and death. The very act of sacrifice of the 'witness' is called martyrdom. The latter refers to enduring suffering and even embracing death, on account of beliefs – particularly spiritual or religious. Socrates, the Greek philosopher, gladly laid his life like a true martyr for his mission i.e. searching truth in himself and others and helping to illuminate the path of moral and spiritual upliftment (Livingstone 1938; Gomperz 1955: 45).

Martyrs choose to suffer death voluntarily rather than deny their faith by words or deeds. A martyr is one who bears witness and chooses to suffer or die voluntarily rather than betray his/her religious or moral principles (Canny 1921: 473; Dilgeer 1997: 63; Guralnik 1975: 901).

Martyrs happened to be those who stood with just cause – be it terrestrial or spiritual –and their tormentors were invariably those

who wielded absolute power. The martyrdom of Mansur Al-Hallaj (also spelled as Mansoor al-Hallaj), a Persian mystic, poet, and scholar of Sufism, for his insistence on *Ana 'l-Haqq* – equivalent of a saying in Sanskrit namely *Aham Brahmasmi* – (I am God. I am the ultimate Truth), and that of Shaheed Bhagat Singh who sacrificed his life during the Indian freedom struggle against the oppressive foreign rule of the British Empire are respectively instances of martyrdom for spiritual and terrestrial causes (for details on Mansur Al-Hallaj see: Hitti 1970; Singh, Kirpal 2004:17; Singh 1970). Shams-i-Tabriz, a Persian Shafi'ite poet and spiritual guide of the great philosopher of Sufism, Jalauddin Rumi, though less celebrated, was another great martyr of the Muslim world in the mode of spiritual cause. Martyred by being flayed alive, as popularly known in India, his name was also associated with a popular miracle of bringing down the sun close enough to bake a piece of meat for him (Talib 1999: 222).

In a similar vein, all those who sacrificed their lives in various battles against invaders from Persia (Nadir Shah) and Afghanistan (Ahmad Shah Abdali) on the one hand, and the Mughal emperors (mainly Jahangir, Aurangzeb, and Farrukhsiyar) and their provincial Subedars/Faujders (mainly Governors of Sirhind and Lahore) on the other, as well as rulers of various princely hill states and later the freedom fighters who laid their lives for the cause of the liberation of their motherland during the long drawn Indian freedom struggle against the British Raj, can be included in the category of martyrdom attained for the terrestrial cause of standing against both the injustice and tyranny unleashed by the rulers of the land and against those outsiders who ventured to plunder the wealth, and outrage the modesty of the women, of the country. Aurobindo Ghosh, progenitor of spiritual nationalism in

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India, exhorted the youth to come forward to sacrifice for the liberation of mother India, who was groaning under the yoke of British rule, is a case of a clarion call for the valorous act of terrestrial martyrdom (Singh, Karan 1970: 74-83). In the spiritual domain of martyrdom, the conviction and courage of a martyr is considered to be even more deep-rooted.

MARTYRDOM IN JUDAISM

In the Jewish tradition, a martyr's self-sacrifice "was believed to atone in part for the community's sin; and classical rabbinic Judaism aimed for the redemption of the entire Jewish people rather than only individual salvation" (Uberoi 1999: 50). Though many studies traced the origin of the terms of martyr and martyrdom to Judaism, no such instances have been identified therein. The nearest description of a martyr in Judaism is termed as *Kadosh* (plural *Kedoshim*) – literally meaning 'holy one'. And the one who dies a martyr is considered to have died *al Kiddush hashem* (witness) for the sanctification of God's name. Moreover, if anyone who also performs a Kiddush hashem in other ways different from the 'sanctification of God's name', for an instance by performing a noble deed/act that reveals/reflects 'well on the Jewish people,' also qualified to be designated as martyr (Freeman n.d.). The use of Kiddush hashem can be traced to the Talmud (lit "study" or "learning") – the main text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law (halakha), and Jewish theology – which impresses upon Jews the merit of sacrificing their life to save themselves from the transgression of any of Judaism's three cardinal sins: Murder, sexual immorality and idolatry. The opposite of *Kiddush hashem* is *hillul hashem*, which means that if any Jew saves his/her life while negating any one of the given three commandments was declared a *hillul hashem* – desecrator of God's name (Ibid.). And those Jews who sacrificed their lives in maintaining the sanctity of the commandments were called martyrs. However, with both the passage of time and the persecution of Jews through the centuries – especially after the Holocaust – any death to which a Jewish identity was central came to be referred to as martyrdom irrespective of the original or scriptural definition of the term. So much so that all Israeli soldiers who died in defense of the sovereignty of their country are now referred to as martyrs. Another qualifying condition relating to the concepts of martyr and martyrdom is the intent on the part of those willing to die in sanctification of the name of God even if they ultimately survived. "Both Isaac, who was willing to be sacrificed at God's instruction, and the three figures from the Book of Daniel – Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah – who were thrown into a furnace rather than worship idols were saved by God, meet this definition" (Ibid.). A similar instance can also be cited from Hindu mythology relating to Bhagat Prahlaad son of demon king Hiranyakashipu, who repeatedly tried to kill him for refusing to disavow Lord Vishnu and continuing to worship

him as a manifestation of God. Though difference of opinions exists in case of a person who committed suicide rather than be captured and defiled, King Saul, who preferred suicide over capture and defilement by the Philistines, is commonly considered to be a martyr. Similar is the story of a woman named Hannah and her sons, all of whom chose death rather than violating religious injunctions prohibiting the eating of pig's meat on the dictates of Antiochus, Seleucid king of the Hellenistic Syrian Kingdom (reigned from 175 to 164 BCE), who had waged a severe persecution of Jews. Another instance was that of a mass suicide at Masada, where some 967 Jews took their own lives to save them from being captured in the last holdouts of the war with Rome southeast of Jerusalem which resulted in the destruction of the Second Temple – the site has become a major tourist attraction and the actions of those Jews who chose to die there rather than to surrender, were celebrated by early Zionists as a model of Jewish heroism, though some Jewish authorities were of the view that suicide is not a religiously legitimate response to political subjugation (Ibid.; see also Singh, Hakam 2004:35; and Singh, Hakam n.d.).

Medieval religious authorities differed on question of suicide being preferable to defilement. Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) in his *Epistle on Martyrdom* (a treatise prepared in response to forced conversions in Spain following an invasion by a fanatical Muslim sect known as the Almohades) was of the opinion that given a choice to a Jew between death and conversion to another religion, s/he should prefer the latter, arguing that making a mere declaration does not qualify as a sin that requires one to die rather than commit it. He continued further that if a Jew who did not fulfill a cardinal commandment in the process of avoiding death, as per the Talmud (Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend emanated from the rabbinic debates in the 2nd-5th century), should not be condemned as either a sinner or even a non-Jew. A Jew is not permitted to seek martyrdom, but rather to seek life and sustain life. A general view is that 'Jews have never sought out martyrdom – it was always martyrdom that caught up to the Jews' (Freeman n.d.). Millions of Jews at different intervals of their collective historical existence have attained martyrdom rather than relinquish their faith during persecution by 'the Assyrians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Muslim conquerors, the Almohadin, the Crusaders, the Inquisition, the Bolsheviks, the Nazis, and many more' (Ibid.). 'True, the Talmud says of those who died *al Kiddush Hashem* that their place in the world to come is beyond the reach of any created being' (Talmud Baba Batra 10b as referred to in Freeman n.d.). But then, the same Talmud also teaches that 'One hour of return and good deeds in this world is more beautiful than all the life of the world to come' (Ethics of the Fathers 4: 1 as referred to in Freeman n.d.). Rabbi Akiva, who was arrested for the crime of teaching the Torah in public, screamed

Shema Yisrael ('Hear O Israel, God is our God, God is one') as he was flayed alive by Roman Soldiers, ran and hid from the Roman persecutor for as long as he could. Similarly, Jews throughout the diaspora used all possible means to survive in the lands of their exile (Ibid.). Thus, it can be said that martyrdom among Jews is at once both the theme and the antithesis of Judaism.

MARTYRDOM IN CHRISTIANITY

During the spread of Christianity, many Christians 'testified' to 'the truth' of their convictions by sacrificing their lives. In the New Testament, it is mainly used for those who testified for 'truth' and resultantly often met with a violent death (Kang 1990: 40). In Christianity, the word martyr in the Apostles originally meant for those who were witness to Jesus Christ's life and resurrection. This meaning was later expanded to encompass those who bore witness to their faith by suffering or death (for details see: Singh, Hakam n.d.). Thus, the common accepted connotation of martyrdom emanates from early Christians, who held the suffering of Christ, culminating in his death by crucifixion, as its archetype. The term 'martyr' refers to 'witness' to truth, and particularly one who gives evidence of 'the truth' by dying and thus becoming a martyr (Kang 1990:40; Yust 1978: 993). It refers 'to give testimony to what someone has seen, heard, believed, or experienced', and so convinced about the testimony that s/he is willing to sacrifice her/his life for the same (Uberoi 1999: 50). Thus, in the Christian tradition, anyone who voluntarily sacrifices his/her life in fidelity to Jesus Christ attains the status and dignity of 'priesthood without ordination' (Uberoi 1999: 50). A common belief among Christians, linked the martyrdom of Christ for washing off the sins committed by humanity through Adam. St. Stephen was considered the first Christian martyr, and was followed by the persecution of thousands of Christians in the Roman Empire in first three centuries of Christianity, for no other reason than the refusal to abandon their faith and to replace it by the pantheon of Roman Gods. St. Paul and St. Peter were among many who fell victim to Roman persecution in this regard. Physical torture and execution of such holdouts continued for long until Christianity became the official religion of Rome (Singh, Sarbjinder 2002: 3-7; Kang 1990: 40; Latourette 1953: 81). In the Roman Catholic Church only those were considered martyrs who died for their faith before or during the Roman persecutions in the second and third centuries, such as Stephen, the first martyr. "It regards martyrs as saints and requires every church altar to contain some of their relics" (Friedman 1981: 578). Non-Catholics are more flexible and extend the term martyr to include those who were killed for matters of faith or belief (Kang 1990: 41).

MARTYRDOM IN ISLAM

In Islamic context, the importance of the terms shahid and shahadat are considered as pure as the very the name of Allah, which is "spoken of as '*al-shahid*', the one who sees men's action" (Kaur, Rajkumari 2002:103). The term

shahid has been used in Quran approximately thirty-five times, particularly with reference to eternity of the existence of Allah and as a witness of His truthfulness and spiritual purity (Singh, Sarbjinder 2002: 8; see also Chandan 2001: 27-28). The Arabic word in Quran, as well as in Muslim theology, for 'martyr' is 'shahid'/'shudud', which also means witness or one who provides testimony (Hughes 1977: 327). Imam Hussain, the second son of Ali and grandson of Prophet Mohammad, is believed to be one of the early shahids in the Islamic tradition, who attained martyrdom in the battlefield of Karbala "along with a number of members from his own family and his tribe, Benu Hashim and from other tribes supporting his cause" while fighting unbelievers (Talib 1999:221).

Recognised as the 'king of martyrs', as later Mansur Al-Hallaj was considered among the Sufis, the martyrdom of Hussain, argued Uberoi, "recalls the passion of Christ and the suffering of St. Francis" (Uberoi 1999: 52). Another great martyr of the Muslim world, but less celebrated, is Sufi Shams-i-Tabriz, the preceptor of the great philosopher of Sufism, Jalaluddin Rumi (Talib 1990: 222).

Martyrdom in Islam, as in the case of classical rabbinic Judaism, not only establishes truth for the benefit of the faithful within his/her religion, but for the entire humanity as emphatically put by one of the chief ideologues of the Islamic revolution in Iran in the 20th century that Hussain "has died in Karbala in order to be resurrected in all (future) generations, in all ages" (as quoted in Uberoi 1999:52). A conglomerate of two concepts, 'witness to faith' and 'witness unto death', the term shahid entails both a 'testimony giver' and a 'martyr' (Ibid.). Though the Arabic word shahada or shahadat is conceptually similar to the word martyrdom, but it entails broader meaning (Singh Kharak 2004: 10). It refers: to see, to witness, to testify or to become a role model. This word is inseparably associated with the Islamic concept of jihad or holy struggle. A shahid (Shahid) is, therefore, a person who in struggle (jihad) witnesses the truth, and stands by it firmly to the extent that not only he testifies to it verbally, but is prepared to fight for the truth and, if necessary, give up his life and thus becomes a role model for others (quoted in Singh, Kharak 2004: 10).

A shahid, in Islam is considered pure and not given a bath before his burial. Given the purity of the act of martyrdom and its wider connotations in Islam, a shahid, argues Uberoi: needs no ritual ablution and has no shroud because he is already pure. By his sacrifice the martyr escapes the Muslim's examination in the grave by the two 'interrogating angels', Munkir, and Nakir, and need not pass through the 'purging fires of Islam', *barzakh*" (Ibid; see also Singh, Sarbjinder 2002: 8-10).

The Islamic concept of shahid, as it evolved in India since the advent of the Mughal rule, was "a composite mainly of elements Jewish and Hellenic, besides of course, what the soil and

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tradition of Arabia lend to it" (Talib 1999: 220). The term *shahid* in Islam, though conceptually similar to that of martyr, implies broader connotations.

In Islam anyone who get killed while fighting in defense of his faith, or in *jihad* (holy war) against infidels is called a *shahid*, 'a perfect witness or martyr, or *ash-shahidu'l-kamil*' (Kaur 2002:103; see also Hughes 1977: 327; and Singh, Harbhajan 2002: 26-28). Inextricably linked with the Islamic concept of *Jihad* (holy struggle), a *shahid* is one who being a participant in *Jihad*, becomes witness to the truth and "stands by it firmly to the extent that not only he testifies to it verbally but is prepared to fight for the truth and if necessary, give up his life and thus become a role model for others" (Ezzati, 1986). A *shahid*, based on the *kurbani* (sacrificion) of his life for his faith or a just cause, stands witness to its truth, and to his/her allegiance to it, and remains ready to die for it rather than renounce his/her own faith or moral ideal (Singh, Hakam n.d.). This meaning is identical to that of the original meaning of the word 'martyr'. Besides Muslims' own celebrated martyrs among the Prophet's followers and descendants, it referred to the Jewish and Christian influence through which its meaning was extracted (Talib 1999: 112; Houtsma and Wensinck 1934).

II

Beyond the Abrahamic Tradition

Given the literal meaning of the terms martyr and martyrdom, as elaborated above, there are no clear instances of actual martyrs/ martyrdoms in ancient Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, though innumerable cases of persecution and killing of those who laid down their lives for the cause of their firm belief in their above mentioned respective religions are available in mythology and otherwise than those of surrendered and crossed over to the faiths of their tormentors (Talib 1999: 223; Kaur 2002:104-106). Reflecting on the absence of the concepts of martyr and martyrdom in ancient religious tradition in India, some scholars were of the opinion that the language of ancient Vedic (Hindu) religion does not have a word equivalent or close to martyrdom. Though recently some scholars began considering the term *balidan* closer to the concept of martyrdom, Swami Ram Tirath, a reputed scholar of Hindu philosophy of Vedanta, particularly 'practical Vedanta', "thinks that in Hinduism human life was considered as a gift from God and therefore too sacred to be glorified when sacrificed for any human endeavor" (Singh, Hakam n.d.; see also Talib 1999: 212-13).

In India, however, the origin of the terms martyr and martyrdom is often coincided with the evolution of Sikhism, the youngest among all the religions in the world. Before the establishment of the Mughal rule in India, such terms were not a part of the indigenous discourse of its religious tradition – Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism (Gandhi: 1980: 453; also see: Singh, Harbans 1997: 55-56; Talib 1999: 212). Though concepts like *deh-tyaag* (relinquishing/sacrificing/forsaking one's

body, i.e. life), *balidan* (sacrifice) or *sankalpa* (an intention or a resolution to do something or achieve something spiritual) etc. were in usage, they cannot be equated with the act of sacrificing oneself for one's beliefs – whether in God or some other cardinal principle – as is the case with the concept of martyrdom. *Sankalpa* is considered as a 'spiritual preparatory stage towards martyrdom' and 'continuing evidence' about its pervasiveness is believed to exist 'in the millennia-old history of the Aryan people, to whom the contemporary generations of non-Muslims in India are the heir' (Talib 1999: 213). However, it could not become the prototype of the terms martyr and martyrdom. The term 'sacrifice' also failed to tally with the intended meaning of the concept of 'martyr'. Invariably, sacrifice identified with rewards in return of the act of sacrificion. In various pagan as well as *Nath*, *Yogi*, *Devi* and *Tantric* cults of the ancient Hindu tradition, sacrificion of various kinds of animals (bull, horse, goat), and human beings were recommended for getting rid of sins, diseases as well as for the attainment of various worldly comforts and boons (Kharak 2004: 14-15). Whereas, martyrdom in Sikhism has nothing to do with such promises and is "inspired by desire to uphold a principle and for common good of humanity" (Ibid.). Martyrdom and sacrificion can be distinguished from each other in the sense that in the former the martyr perfumed the act of sacrificion himself for the cause of one's faith or defending the same in the battlefield. Whereas, in the case of latter, the sacrificion is often done on the behalf of someone else, who intended to draw benefit out of the act of scarification?

The absence of the concepts of *shahid* (martyr) and *shahadat* (martyrdom) in pre-Mughal India did not allow the articulation of such conditions and experiences which can be qualified to cover under the established and standardized terminology of martyr and martyrdom (Talib 1999: 213). However, given the varied interpretations and connotations of the terms of martyr and martyrdom, some incidences referred to in Hindu mythology are often placed within their broader genre, "which hardly reflect the great act redolent of the spiritual struggle and sacrifice that is implied in martyrdom" (Talib 1999: 213). Nevertheless, the concepts of martyr and martyrdom remained unfamiliar in Indian culture before the martyrdom of Guru Arjan (Singh 1968: 212; Singh, Narain 1967), which was followed by many more recorded instances of martyrdom in Sikhism. The martyrdom of the ninth Master, Guru Tegh Bahadur, stands alone as a glorious example in this regard wherein he chose to forgo his life – ot for the sake of his own faith but others – on the principle of freedom of religion or belief for those who approached him for their emancipation from the tyranny of forced conversion let loose by Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, rather than capitulation to sectarian dictates, albeit imperial ones (Ralhan 1997: 167). Equally inspiring were the martyrdoms of the younger Sahibzadas (Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh) of the tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh – grandsons of the ninth Master, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and great-

great grandsons of the fifth Master, Guru Arjan – who were bricked live; a lone, but dazzling example of its kind in humankind's history of martyrdom, especially given their tender age of nine and seven years of Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh respectively (Singh, Jaswant 2004: 59; cf. Kapur 2004: 115; Singh, Gajinder 2004: 47; and) – an age at which one is often not expected to take one's own decision. Kirpal Singh, and another scholar of Sikh studies, Gajinder Singh, were of the opinion that the youngest Sahibzada, Fateh Singh, was hardly of six years at the time of his martyrdom (Singh, Kirpal 2004: 23; Singh Gajinder 2004: 47). Their martyrdoms established a new milestone in the sacred and valorous tradition of martyrdom not only in South Asia but the entire world.

Thus, the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur and that of the younger Sahibzadas remains an aspect of Sikh martyrdom, which needs to be explored more deeply to comprehend the uniqueness of the Sikh religion in respect of its contributions towards the promotion of universal human rights, the sanctity of freedom of belief, as well as general principles of dignity and moral values. It is in this context that a long quote from one of the seminal writings of J.P.S. Uberoi will not be out of place here:

The comparative study of martyrdom, which is evidently still in its infancy, may yet come to the mature conclusion that the part played by the principle of vicariousness is essential to explain the life, death and after-life of one who undergoes suffering and death voluntarily as active witness to truth. The self-sacrifice of the real and the true martyr mysteriously results in the resurrection of the congregation and serves the cause of truth: that is the long and the short of its history, theology and sociology (Uberoi 1999: 50). In the following section an attempt has been made to distinguish Sikh martyrdom from its counterparts in the mainstream Abrahamic/ Semitic traditions.

III

The Tradition of Shahadat/ Martyrdom in Sikhism

Explicating the Content and Contest

In Sikhism, a martyr is the embodiment of an infallible faith in the purity and divine authority of the *Nirakar/Akal Purkh* (also spelt as *Purakh*) – formless supreme being beyond the measurement of time and space) – as well as a personification for the cause of righteousness (*dharma*) and establishing social justice, and therefore martyrdom (*shahadat*, *shahidi*) occupies a central place within the institutional set up of Sikhism (for details see: Dogra and Mansukhani 1995: 308; Kapur 2002: 31-41; Kaur, Abnesh 2002: 63-67; Kaur, Gurnam 2002: 68-80; Saggu 2009 195-281; Singh, Balkar 2002: 89-98; Singh, Shamsher 2002: 42-48; Singh 2004: 26-33; Singh 2009: 138-145). Emanating from a glorious tradition which bespoke of the confluence of *Piri* and *Miri* – the spiritual and temporal realms respectively – and in convergence with the equally glorious and corresponding tradition of *Degh* (cauldron to provide food to the needy on the basis of the gurmat principle of *sangat*/spiritual congregation

and *pangat*/sitting together to eat without caste, class creed and gender consideration) and *Tegh* (the use of arms to protect the weak from persecution irrespective of all ascriptive identities whatsoever), the pious and epistemic domain of *sant-sipahi* (saint-soldier) forms the core of the Sikh concepts of martyr and martyrdom. Infused with divine love and love for Guru, compassion, fearlessness, *seva* (selfless service), and self-sacrifice for the cause of spiritual deeds, justice, and righteous actions, the nature of martyrdom in Sikh faith can safely be distinguished from its counterparts in the mainstream Abrahamic/Semitic traditions (Singh, Ganda 1977: 40-43; Singh, Dharam 2004: 36-37; for a detailed account of the concept *sangat* see: Malhotra 2023: 44-45). It is bereft of both the 'guilt complex' of the Christian tradition, and the 'promise of reward' embedded in the Islamic concept of *shahadat* (Singh, Hakam 2004: 35-36 Singh, Kharak 2004: 10-11).

The phenomenon of martyrdom reached new heights in the teachings of its progenitor and the first Master, Baba Guru Nanak, who introduced the virtue of fearlessness in the minds of his followers as an integral way of their life exemplified in the sacred scriptures of *Adi Granth* (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, henceforth SGGs):

*jau tau prem khelan ka chau
siru dhari tali gali meri au
itu margi pairu dharijai
siru dijai kani na kijai*

(Nanak's slok Varan te Vadhik 20, SGGs:1412). If you want to play the game of love, approach me with your head on the palm of your hand. Place your feet on this path and give your head without regard to the opinion of others (text above in the roman and English translation adapted from: Fenech 1977:630).

Guru Nanak, averred Hakam Singh:

"did not offer any rewards or enticements for playing the game of love even at the cast of one's life. Also, there is no guilt complex among Sikhs because none of the Sikh Gurus gave any promise of intercession for anyone who expressed unconditional full faith in Sikhism... Furthermore, Sikhism does not believe in sinful birth of human beings. Love for God and Guru, or staying steadfastly on the path that leads to the Supreme Reality, is something that is beyond the idea of any rewards corresponding to attainment of paradise full of virgins (as promised in Islam). Sikh history is full of examples where all kinds of worldly rewards and even promises of paradise (after death) were offered but the Sikh martyrs summarily rejected them for the sake of love for their Guru and God" (Singh, Hakam 2004: 37-38; emphasis added in italics within parenthesis).

Sikhism emphasises the inculcation of the cardinal principle of living a life of fearlessness not just for oneself, but for negating all kinds of injustices and cruelty. Fearlessness and surrender to the Will of God, including pronouncements made by the ten Sikh Gurus (enshrined in SGGs) as instruments of His Will, are what become the cradle of martyr and martyrdom in Sikh faith.

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The essence of Guruship in Sikhism, however, is also distinguished from the mainstream religions of the sub-continent. To quote Ganda Singh, an accomplished authority on Sikh studies: The Guru in Sikhism is the spiritual guide to lead his disciples on the path of God and godliness. He is a guide, a perfect man, who has realized God in his practical life. He, however, does not claim for himself any special position in relation to the Sikhs beyond that of a teacher. A Sikh will, as well, rise to the same spiritual heights as the Master provided he faithfully follows the instructions in the conduct of his life. There will be no difference between the two (*Asa, Chhant, IV, 8,7,9* as referred to in Singh, Ganda 1977: 43).

The tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh, went a step further during the historic baptism ceremony (*Khande di Pauhl*) of Baisakhi, 1699, pronouncing: "He alone is a Sikh who follows the discipline laid down. Nay, he becomes my Master and I, his servant" (as quoted in Singh, Ganda 1977: 43). To quote Ganda Singh further:

The voluntary surrender of Guru Gobind Singh to the fold of the baptized *Singhs, the Khalsa*, was unique in the history of religions. It not only provides a practical illustration of rising the disciples and devotees to a level of equality with the Guru but also abolishes personal Guruship among the Sikhs for all time to come (Singh, Ganda 1977: 43).

It was in the aforementioned context that the shahadat given by the fifth Master, Guru Arjan, the first martyr in the line of historic Guruship in Sikhism, the custodian of the task for the construction of the sacred sarovar (tank of nectar), Harimandir (Darbar Sahib), the town of Ramdaspur (Amritsar), founder of the towns of Tarn Taran, Sri Hargobindpur, and Kartarpur (Jalandhar), and the compiler of SGGS, who thus contributed seminally towards the consolidation of the structural organisation of Sikhism and therefore has a particularly prominent profile in the pantheon of Sikh Gurus, needs to be understood as a shining example of faith in Hukum (Divine Order or Will) of Akal Purkh (Supreme Being/God), and adherence to truth irrespective of consequences (Grewal: 2009: 20; Nishter 2004:76-79; Singh 1994; Puri 1993); and the same was seen in the martyrdom of both the ninth Master, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and the youngest Sahibzadas of the tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh – the grandson and great-great grandsons respectively of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Arjan.

THE FAITH AND THE TRADITION

Guru Nanak laid the foundation of Sikhism, the youngest of the major religions of the world, on the basis of negation of caste, dignity of women, standing with the lowest of low, earning by the sweat of one's brow, sharing fruits of one's labour with others, and making endeavours for the creation of an egalitarian social, but the wellspring was attunement to, and expression of, the Will of the formless God (Ram 2023: 147-48). He discarded the then prevalent asceticism promulgated by the various sects of mainstream Hinduism and deeply rooted in the bhakti of Gods and

Goddesses, based on complex rituals, customs, traditions, and ceremonies, and further underlined with the dos and don'ts of the Varnashram dharma (a social system of assigning duties and responsibilities based on a person's social class/Varna and stages of life/ashram). To extirpate social segregation based on the extant caste system, Baba Nanak, as mentioned earlier, established the social institutions of *sangat* and *pangat*, where all people irrespective of their faith, class, caste, and gender come together: in a spirit of goodwill and understanding, sang the hymns of the Master and prayed to the Lord to grant to them gift of the recitation of His Holy Name, of honest livelihood and sharing their earnings with others and of service of their fellow-beings at large, without distinction of caste and creed" and partake langar (food), prepared in the common kitchen of the community, "sitting together of all present in rows for dinning, irrespective of caste and creed, of Hindu and Muslim, or of rich and poor (Singh, Ganda 1977: 40-41).

Within the Sikh faith, a shahid (martyr), is thus not necessarily one who died in battlefield fighting, but also one who lays down his life fighting against injustice (whether perpetrated by either believers or non-believers), in upholding epicentral principles and tenets of his faith – an exemplar being the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Nanak, who:

took up cudgels on behalf of the hapless Hindus single-handedly for *redeeming the principle of freedom of faith, irrespective of religious tradition*. In Indian history and folklore, he has been remembered as the protector of the Hindu faith – a unique example of its kind in the history of mankind. Interestingly, there are several Sikh scriptural hymns criticizing the janeu and tilak which the Brahmanical class then considered an end in themselves, thus giving precedence to form over the spirit of religion, but the Guru stood for freedom of belief and practice for everyone. *The religious history of mankind provides no second example of a spiritual leader laying down his life for people belonging to a religion other than his own. Second, the Sikh Gurus had nothing against Islam as such - and indeed, the writings of muslim mystics are found in the SGGS itself - and the Sikh scripture unequivocally states that the scriptures of neither hinduism or islam can be called false, rather false are those who do not reflect on them*. Had the contemporary political situation in India been the other way round, *Guru Tegh Bahadur would surely have made the same sacrifice for the sake of Muslims* (Singh, Dharam 2004: 32; *emphasis added in italics*).

The Sikh faith since its very beginnings with the teachings and praxis of Baba Guru Nanak (1469-1539) cultivated this ideal form of martyrdom in the minds of its followers, and this distinguished it, as mentioned above, from the Semitic tradition of martyrdom. The distinction of becoming the first martyr in Sikhism, beyond the historic tradition of Guruship, goes to Qazi Rukan-ud-din, who enamoured by the spiritual teachings of Baba Guru Nanak during his visit (fourth *Udasi*) to Arabia, became his disciple and was killed for refusing to dis-

own his newly-acquired Sikh identity (Tajudin 2019:40-68). The second Sikh martyr during the initial period of the evolution of the Sikh faith was Bhai Taru Popat, who was killed in 1526, by being set on fire, for raising his voice against the cruelties of the first Mughal Emperor Babur (Singh, Giani Bhajan 1991:11-13). In both of these first two cases of martyrdom outside the fold of the historic line of Guruship and during the foundational period of the Sikh faith, love for God and Guru and the faith based on his teachings alone stands for the vindication of the act of martyrdom.

The martyrdom of Guru Arjan, who was executed under the yasa order of Mughal emperor Jahangir (for details see: Singh 1969; Singh, Ganda 1978: 160-177; Singh 2005: 29-62; Grewal 2009: 19-34) was catalytic for the emergent contours of a distinct Sikh identity. Henceforth, an element of military power was inculcated in the rank and file of the Sikh faith under the supreme spiritual and temporal authority of the succeeding, and sixth Master, Guru Hargobind Singh transforming Sikhs into a valorous socio-spiritual movement for the saviour of the downtrodden, victims of injustice, and socially excluded sections of society, and was reinforced following the martyrdom of the ninth Master, Guru Tegh Bahadur, which gave rise to the Khalsa (a spiritual warrior order) formed at an historical congregation of followers of the faith in 1699 at Anandpur Sahib, Panjab, under the spiritual command of the tenth master, Guru Gobind Singh.

Even though, the fifth Master, Guru Arjan, became the first historic Guru martyr within Sikhism, and the ninth Master, Guru Tegh Bahadur, the second martyr, the theoretical foundation of martyr and martyrdom was however laid during the time of the first Master, Guru Nanak, who used the term shahid in his *bani* (spiritual poetry) while reflecting on the prevalence of evil and tyranny all around in the society (Adi Granth: 53; Kang 1990: 46-47). He gave a clarion call for putting an end to injustice and cruelty, and called upon his followers to ready themselves for resolutely facing suffering and tyranny. God, he stipulated, will always be with the righteous. Guru Nanak's teachings emphasised the omnipresence of a single, formless God, while his exhortations against injustices perpetrated by the powers that be and their henchmen – whom he dared addressed as tigers and dogs respectively – the latter, emphasised Baba Nanak, awakened, disturbed, and harassed the sitting and resting masses, inflicted wounds on them, and snatched away whatever they possessed including their blood and bile.

The Kings are tigers and the courtiers' dogs, they go and (harass) or (awaken) the sitting and the sleeping ones. The King's servants inflict wound with their nails. The King's curs lick up the blood and bile of the poor subjects. Where in the Lord's Court, the men are to be assayed. The noses of these untrustworthy ones shall be chopped off (Adi Granth: 1288; as referred to in Kang 1990: 47; cf. Singh, Ganda 1977: 35-36).

Guru Nanak did not mince words in proclaiming that the path of Sikhism was hazardous and difficult to follow: If the situation arises, one should

be ready to sacrifice one's life. He advised his followers not to refrain from laying down one's life, and further remarked forcefully:

If one knows how to die, O people, then, call not death bad. Fruitful is the dying of the brave persons, who are approved before their death. Hereafter, they alone are acclaimed as warriors, who receive true honour in the Lord's court (Adi Granth: 579-80; as referred to in Kang 1990: 48).

Thus, the phenomenon of martyrdom in Sikhism draws its essence from the *Gurubani*, i.e. the writings of the SGGS (for details see: Kapur 2002: 31-41; Kaur, Abnesh: 2002: 63-67; Kaur, Gurnam 2002:68-80; Kaur, Gurnam 2004: 49-55; Kaur, Rupinderjit 2002:67-71; Nishter, 2004:76-79; Singh, Dharam 2004: 29-30; Singh, Hakam 2004: 37-39; Singh, Harbhajan 2002: 28-30; Singh, Prehlad 2002: 84-88; Singh, Sarbjinder 2002:12-22; Singh, Shamsheer 2002:43-48; and Shan 2004:184-85) The term Shahid figured once each in the bani of Guru Nanak, Sant Ravidass, and four times in the compositions of Bhai Gurdas, maternal uncle of Guru Arjan, who also served him as his amanuensis in the compilation of the SGGS (Adi Granth: 1293; Grewal 2011: 195; Singh 1996:1-2; Kang 1990: 46-7; Chandan 2001: 28-30). Reference to the act of dying with honour also figured within the

Dasam Granth, the *Chandi Charitr* – the authorship of which is attributed to Guru Gobind Singh – for seeking divine boon to lay down one's life for righteous cause:

*Deh siva baru mohi ihai subh karman te kabahun
na taron Na daro ari so jab jai laron nischai kari
apuni jit karon Ar sikhaho apne hi mana koi h
lalach hau gun tau ucharo Jab av ki audh nidhan
banai ati hi ran mai tab jujh maron* Lord grant me this boon:

Never may I turn back from righteousness;
May I never turn back in fear when facing the foe;
May I ever instruct my mind to chant Thy praises;
And when the end arrives,
May I fall fighting on the field of battle (adapted from: Singh, Dharam 2004:29; see also Fenech 1997:634)

The Khalsa, in fact, was born of martyrdom itself and metamorphosed Sikhs into *sant-sipahis* (saint-soldiers). The Khalsa was created by the martyrdom of five Sikhs offering their heads for the cause of putting an end to injustice and tyranny, as demanded in an assembly on the day of Baisakhi in 1699 by the tenth Guru. The baptised five Singhs (*Panj Piare*) in turn baptised Guru Gobind Singh, leading to an unparalleled juxtaposition between the Khalsa and the Guru as expressed by the term:

Waih pargateo mard agammra waryam ikela Wah, wah Gobind Singh, ape Gur chela

And lo! There appeared an unsurpassable man;

Wonderful, wonderful is Guru Gobind Singh, a unique hero,

A venerable preceptor as well as a
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humble disciple (adapted from Singh, Ganda 1977: 60).

The Khalsa was the advent of the idea of 'sant-sipahis' (saint-soldiers) in Sikhism, and further, it established a pathway for the baptism of adherents who were ready to die for their faith and stand with the weak, and victims of injustice and tyranny (Kang 1990:50). It is in this sense that Guru Gobind Singh thus illustrated that the concept of martyrdom encompassed the sacrificial act of death on the battlefield in defence of religion.

Thus, articulates Surjit Singh Gandhi, martyrdom in Sikhism is not self-extinction, it is on the other hand a sort of affirmation in the faith the martyr holds and a positive projection of the urge of the martyr to uphold virtue and to resist evil" (Gandhi 1980: 460; Gandhi 2004: 102-112).

Based on the above-mentioned discussion of the term martyr, many Sikhs who died defending their faith and battling for a just cause since the early eighteenth century were considered martyrs. Banda Bahadur and his 794 companions who were executed at Delhi, "to be out to the sword at the rate of a hundred a day" (Singh, Ganda 1977: 69), and a large number of Sikhs who were killed during the rule of various tyrant governors – Zakariya Khan, Mir Mannu, Yahyya Khan, and Shah Nawaz as well as during invasions of the marauding armies of Ahmed Shah Abdali, whether for religious or political causes, are claimed to be martyrs by the Sikhs (Kang 1990: 1). By the close of the eighteenth century and after, the term 'Shahid' had acquired wide currency (Fenech 1997:632-35). It came to be deployed in all those cases in which the supreme sacrifice (willingly or unwillingly) was evident in pursuit of socially approved ideals (Gandhi 1980:462) thus leading to large number of martyrdoms in the proud Sikh community at the altar of its faith (Gill 1975: 5).

CHALLENGING

THE SKEPTICAL VIEWPOINT

Some studies however, showed ambivalence in the case of the martyrdom of the fifth Master, Guru Arjan, the first martyr in Sikhism. Scholars of Sikh studies like Harjot Oberoi, W.H. McLeod, and the students of McLeod – later accomplished researchers – particularly Louis E. Fenech, drew a sharp line of distinction between the Sikh tradition and the available factual historical evidence in explaining the 'martyrdom' of Guru Arjan. They did not give any credence to the Sikh tradition about martyrs and martyrdom (Chhibber 1972; Bhalla 1971; Gupta 1984; Singh, Giani Gian 1970; Singh, Jagjit 1981, Singh 1967; Singh 1977), and were of the opinion that as far as factual historical evidence is concerned, it is too scant to support the tradition (for details see: Banga 2009: 162-79; Grewal 2011: 188- 216). For them the institution of 'martyr' and 'martyrdom' begins with the ninth Guru, who valiantly offered his head in keeping with the precepts of his faith. Louis Fenech argued, as is evident in many of his meticulously prepared writings, that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries one could hardly find any discernible source on the basis of which it

could have been established that the fifth Master, Guru Arjan, was a martyr and therefore the fact of forsaking his mortal frame could not conclusively be designated as an act of martyrdom.

The words 'death' and 'murder' were often used to convey the shahadat of Guru Arjan at the hands of his persecutors (Fenech 1997: 626; McLeod 1975: 3; McLeod 1995: 40-41;), who were actually authorised to implement the Mughal order of *siyasta o' yasa rasanand* (frequently referred to as *tora/tura* in Mughal chronicles, *yasa* is a Mongolian term for law, and *siyasta* for punishment of death without shedding a drop of blood of princes and holy persons for fear of calamities) issued by emperor Jahangir for the torturous end of his mortal frame. No credible alternative accounts, Fenech emphasised, of this critical episode in Sikh history have been found so far (Fenech 1977: 623-42; Fenech 2002: 1, 23; Fenech 2001: 20-31; Fenech 2010: 75-94; for details about *Yasa* see: Singh 2005:31-32). Death and martyrdom, however, are two distinctly separate terms. The latter is distinguishable from the former in the sense that it refers to 'death for a cause' (Oberoi: 1996: 114-23, 135, 151). These terms clearly denote two separate phenomena. "The term 'martyrdom', averred Sikh scholar Kirpal Singh, is not identical with death," He continues, "persons die of various causes on which they have no control or have no escape; martyrdom, on the other hand, is offering one's life for some noble principle knowingly and deliberately" (Singh, Kirpal 2004:16). Another characteristic of martyrdom, which sharply distinguishes it from that of death, as cogently argued by Dharam Singh a scholar of Sikh philosophy, is that:

one must be willing to suffer privation and even meet death fighting against these and such other evils, with no personal motive or interest attached to that fight. In fact, true martyrdom, in Sikhism, lies in the willingness to suffer without flinching. Guru Nanak and his successors prepared their disciples for this with a view to erecting a social setup where values of equality and love, justice and tolerance, compassion and self-respect prevail (Singh, Dharam 2004: 30).

Similarly, the case of murder is also distinctly different from martyrdom. Murder denotes the killing of a victim irrespective of any principles, whereas in the case of martyrdom one proactively lays down his/her own life for a cause – either in defence of one's faith or/and fighting against injustice and tyranny. Even as in Christianity, the crucifixion of Jesus, the beheading of his contemporary John Baptist (15BC-28AD) at the instigation of Salome, the daughter of Herodia, the ruler; and the burning at the stake of John Husa (1369-1415) for his unorthodox doctrine, cannot be considered to be ordinary killings, but martyrdoms; so is the martyrdom of Guru Arjan at the hands of his tormentors at Lahore in 1606 (cf. Singh, Kirpal 2004:17).

Another argument that Louis Fenech raised relating to the case of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, looks more like a legal argument than an historical analysis. He was of the opinion that until the mid- twentieth century, the absence

of the terms 'martyr' and 'martyrdom' within general Sikh literature, proves the non-existence of martyrs and martyrdom in Sikhism, even though references to such terms can be found in the Sikh *Ardas* (prayer) "throughout eighteenth- and early- to mid-nineteenth-century Sikh literature, it is not until the mid-twentieth century that the *Ardas* assumed the form it has today" (Fenech 1997:626; Fenech 2002: 63-102, 117-23). Thus, the actual process of formation of these terms and the very form that the *Ardas* has acquired today, argued Fenech, were products of the late-nineteenth century Sikh 'reform' movement, the Singh Sabha, and more precisely of the intellectual efforts of its micro group popularly called Tat Khalsa (True Khalsa) 'informed in parts through dialogue with Western Orientalism' (Fenech 2017: 626; cf. Oberoi 1994). Thus, he asserts that the concept of the martyr and the central place which it has acquired over time within the *Ardas* got articulated during the rise of Tat Khalsa within the Sikh reform movement, which eventually impacted the whole process of its concretization within the Sikh discourse during the twentieth century (Fenech 2002: 190)

Based on the aforementioned narrative, Louis Fenech tried to explicate the concept of martyrdom in Sikhism through the medium of two questions: are a concept of martyrdom and the Sikh reverence towards its martyrs characteristics that can be traced throughout the history of the Sikh people? Is the image of the martyr we have in *Ardas* the image we find to the nineteenth century? (Fenech 1977: 626).

In his next article entitled "Martyrdom and the Execution of Guru Arjan in Early Sikh Sources," carried in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (Fenech 2001: 20-31), Fenech further argued that:

a meticulous analysis of contemporary and near-contemporary sources does not substantiate the claims of Sikh tradition. Such analysis, in other words, makes it clear that many scholars extrapolate far too much from these texts, filling in the numerous gaps in the narrative these sources supply with popular understandings forged in later centuries. And, secondly, *I seriously doubt that martyrdom as a concept was present in the Sikh tradition during the early to mid-seventeenth century*, in as much as an investigation of the many hymns in the *Adi Granth* used by traditional Sikh scholars to support the presence of this conceptual system *are always taken out of context and misconstrued*. It appears to me that the relatively stable political and social atmosphere of sixteenth-century northern India, due in large part to the benign policies of the emperor Akbar and to the relatively small size of the Sikh Panth, did not necessitate such a generalized doctrine of redemptive death (Fenech 2001: 21; *emphasis added in italics*).

To address the above-mentioned critical issues, Fenech began his investigation by critically analysing the narrative of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan as presented in the Sikh tradition on the basis of distinction between tradition and evidence. His central argument is based

on his conviction that the Sikh tradition of martyrdom lacks historical evidence and its absence of a terminology of synonyms of the words 'martyr' and 'martyrdom'.

GURU ARJAN: THE EPITOME OF SIKH MARTYRDOM

As per the Sikh tradition, Guru Arjan was martyred in 1606 under the order of Mughal emperor Jahangir following the Mongolian pattern of execution with torture without allowing a drop of blood from the body of the culprit to spill on the ground (Singh 2005: 31-32). Emperor Jahangir, the Sikh tradition says, was deeply distressed with Guru Arjan for a number of reasons primarily for his support to shahzada (prince) Khusrau, his son and rival claimant to the Mughal throne. As the tradition unfolds, it is believed that Guru Arjan received shahzada Khusrau and allegedly blessed him with a *qashqa or teeka* (victory mark) on his forehead. Earlier, his grandfather, Emperor Akbar, also visited the third Master, Guru Amar Dass and the fifth Master, Guru Arjan, partook in *Langar* (food prepared in common kitchen), reduced agricultural tax on the then hard-pressed peasants, and had received the blessings of these Gurus (Singh Ganda 1978: 173; Grewal 2009: 20). However, as far as the historical veracity of the narrative of the Guru's blessing for Khusrau was concerned, there is neither any unanimity among the scholars of Sikh studies nor any historical evidence (Singh, Ganda 1977: 48-50).

There were several reasons attributed to emperor Jahangir's order against Guru Arjan. Firstly, the burgeoning following of Guru Arjan not only among the Hindus but also 'foolish Muslims' – as the emperor referred to the latter, and mentioned in the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangir/ Jahangirnama* (autobiographical account of emperor Jahangir life), secondly the uninterrupted existence of the Sikh faith since the times of Baba Nanak, a faith which he contemptuously called 'false traffic' to soon be done away with, and thirdly, the alleged conspiratorial roles played by both Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, head of the Sufi Naqashbandi Silsila – who was deeply aggrieved by the respect Guru Arjan enjoyed among the populace across caste, class, and creed – and by Chandu Shah of Lahore who was an official in service of the Lahore Subedar (ruler) and whose daughter's solicited marriage to the son (and later the sixth Guru Hargobind Singh) of Guru Arjan had been declined, and now wanted to either avenge this perceived insult or to force the Guru to reconsider and accept this marriage proposal.

Shaikh Ahmand Sirhindi, a bitter opponent of emperor Akbar's policy of respect for non-Muslim religions and leniency on the proper implementation of shariat/ Islamic rule of law, found an opportunity in the eagerness of prince Salim (later emperor Jahangir) to usurp the Mughal throne from his father emperor Akbar. He promised prince Salim his full support through his disciple and the Subedar of Lahore, Murtza Khan (Shaikh Farid Bukhari) conditional on the prince agreeing to abandon the liberal policies adopted by his father, emperor Akbar. The aggrieved Shaikh wanted the

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strict implementation of Shariat law and putting an end to all other faiths, which were 'kafir' in his eyes. However as far as the historical evidence about the involvement of either Chandu Shah or Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi in the martyrdom of Guru Arjan is concerned, Ganda Singh, as in the case of Guru's blessing to Khusrav, found no merit in them whatsoever. There are no references to either Shaikh Sirhindi or Chandu Shah in the only available authentic historical source – *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* (Singh, Ganda 1978: 160). However, with regard to the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, emperor Jahangir has recorded:

under whose orders Guru Arjan was arrested and executed in 1606, should, historically speaking, be taken as the best and the most reliable authority... He was the chief prosecuting authority to exhibit the criminal charge against him as well as the final judge in the case to pass the sentence of death on him. And fortunately for history, we have both, the Emperor's charges and his sentence, available to us in his own words as recorded by him in his autobiography, the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, writes Ganda Singh (1978: 160).

According to Jahangir:

There lived at Goindwal on the bank of the river Biah (Beas) a Hindu named Arjun in the garb of a Pir and Shaikh, so much so that he had by his ways and means captivated the hearts of many simple-minded Hindus, nay, even of foolish and stupid Muslims and he had noised himself about as a religious and worldly leader. They called him Guru, and from all directions, fools and fool-worshippers were attracted towards him and expressed full faith in him. For three or four generations they had kept this shop warm. For a long time the thought had been presenting itself to me that either I should put an end to this false traffic or he should be brought into the fold of Islam" (adapted from Singh, Ganda 1978: 160).

Though some reference is available in the *Jahangirnama* about the alleged visit of prince Khusrav and to the episode of applying a *qashqa* (teeka) on his forehead by Guru Arjan, Ganda Singh was of the opinion that:

This was all a concoction of the interested traducers of the Guru ... to excite the ire of the short-tempered Emperor to issue the orders of the Guru's execution all at once without making any enquiries about it... His mind had already been prejudiced against the Guru and he was only waiting for an opportunity to put an end to his preachings... The Guru was not a politician to be in any way interested in the success of the prince's rebellion. As far as the *qashqa* or *teeka*, never in the history of the Gurus there has been any occasion for any Guru to anoint any one, Sikh or non-Sikh. Even the succeeding (*as well as preceding*) Guru was never *teeka'd* by any Guru himself. This practice was followed by all the gurus up to the time of the last Guru. Guru Arjun could not have departed from and gone against the accepted practice of his religion (Singh, Ganda 1977: 48-50; for more details also see: Singh 1969; emphasis added in *italic in parenthesis*).

In the light of the aforemen-

tioned texts, there remains no doubt about the arrest and execution of Guru Arjan for his popularity, religious preaching and refusal to come into the fold of Islam under the dictate of emperor Jahangir. He preferred to forsake his life than to abandon his faith – clear evidence of his being a martyr. This also refutes the polemical narrative woven by Louis Fenech around his wild conjectures that since the whole process of Guru Arjan's execution:

was purposely kept in a private affair since there exists no evidence to suggest that Guru Arjan's execution was public. The cause for which the Guru died (if there was one), an essential component in the transformation of a victim into a martyr, therefore, would not have been known or made known, as the event lacked a Sikh witness (Fenech 2001: 23).

Elsewhere, while stretching his conjecture of the private affair of the execution of the Guru, Louis Fenech was of the opinion that though one finds a reference in the seventeenth century source of the *Dabistan-i-Mazhib*/*The School of Religion* (1645 CE.) in which a mention was made about an actual observer as an eyewitness account of the execution of the Guru amidst 'the heat of the sun, the severity of summer, and the tortures of the bailiffs' (Fenech 1997: 627; for details see: Singh 1967: 47-71), actually this information was also not based on personal account of the author of this source (Dabistan-i-Mazhib) but was procured from someone else almost forty years after the happening (Ibid). To quote Fenech further: The statement regarding the tortures to which the Guru was subjected may well have been part of mid-seventeenth-century oral tradition, and the tortures may have in fact occurred, as Jahangir notes in his memoirs... that he had ordered Arjan to be 'punished [scil., tortured?] and execute (*siyasat o yasa rasanand*)' (Ibid). He continued:

Yet neither the *Dabistan-i-Mazhib* nor the emperor's orders are enough to verify beyond doubt that Arjan was indeed tortured during his imprisonment. We may assume from the references in the emperor's memoirs that some form of punishment was meted out to the Guru, but that these included the particular punishments narrated above cannot be substantiated (Ibid).

However, the absence of factual evidence is not always an essential condition to credibly assert the existence and nature of an event on a balance of probabilities, when the availability of circumstantial evidence substantiates it. Moreover, in the case of the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, to whom Sukha Singh (Singh, Sukha 1989 rpt.) refers to in his *Gurbilas Patshahi* 10 'as the bestower of the gift of fearlessness on the world', and Ganda Singh as the one:

who was not only the leader of Sikh religion, holding a position 'equivalent to that of Pope amongst the Christians,' to use the words of the Rev. Fr. Fernao Guerreiro, but also a saint and a scholar who had given to the world a scripture of highest order," (Singh, Ganda 1978: 170),

it will be a wishful thinking to, dare disobey the order of an autocrat despot whose word was law? ... and who

himself being under pressure of the revivalist Muhammadans and political necessity 'to act as defender of the Islamic faith' has to 'prove the bonafides of his promise to act as a defender of Islam and a saviour of the Muslims from the influences of non-Muslims (Singh, Ganda 1978:171 & 174).

Other circumstantial evidence in support of the horrendous torture inflicted on Guru Arjan under the yasa orders of the Mughal emperor was: the story of how two young Armenian Christian children, aged 14 and 10 years were ordered by Jahangir to be flogged in his own presence with a whip, used for scourging criminals, to coerce them to repeat the *Kalima* as a confession of the acceptance of the faith of Islam, how cruelly Jahangir 'ordered them to be held hand and foot and despite their protestations and cries had them circumcised then and there, in his own presence and how mercilessly the bleeding children were whipped again and again, under his orders and in his very presence, to make them repeat the words of the *Kalima* after their forceful circumcision, is too painful and heartrending to be narrated here (Singh, Ganda 1978:: 174-75).

The preceding narration depicts the extent to which emperor Jahangir 'in the beginning of his reign ... to which he could then sink at the instigation of the orthodox mullas' (Ibid.: 175), who had extracted a promise from him to abandon the liberal policy towards non-Muslim religion adopted by his father, emperor Akbar, for their support to him in capturing the Mughal throne. Ganda Singh continues:

The sentence, of a tortuous death passed against Guru Arjan in the first year of his reign was, therefore, in keeping with the then changed religious policy and mental attitude to which wild cruelty was not a thing unknown (Ibid.).

Against the background of the above-mentioned discussion about the state-of-mind of emperor Jahangir, and buying the reverse argument of Louis Fenech, one can ask where is the evidence to prove beyond doubt that Guru Arjan was indeed not tortured during his imprisonment? Secondly, was it possible for someone to disregard the yasa orders issued by emperor Jahangir against Guru Arjan? However, the certainty inherent in Louis Fenech's conclusion wilts under scrutiny – on what basis can he unequivocally assert that Guru Arjan was not tortured? Who would have the temerity to disobey a yasa order by the emperor himself, and if so, then what was the incentive for taking such a step which if discovered – and it would have been extremely difficult to have hidden such defiance concerning such a high profile personage – would have attracted the death penalty? No proof of any such has been presented by either Fenech or anyone else.

Thus, given the choice between a tortuous end of life under the yasa order, or the embrace of Islam, as per the sole available authentic historical source of *Jahangirnama*, Guru Arjan preferred the former, and became the first martyr in the historic Guruship tradition of Sikh history. Other prominent martyrdoms in the spiritual Sikh history, were that of the ninth Master, Guru Tegh

Bahadur – about whom records are available in relatively greater details in *Dasam Granth* (Jaggi & Jaggi 1999; Singh, Jodh and Singh Dharam 1999), especially the *Bachitar Natak*; *Gurbilas* texts of Sainapat (Sainapat 1967), Koer Singh (Singh, Koer; Malhotra 2022: 66-81) and Sukha Singh (Singh, Sukha); *Shahidbilas* of Sewa Singh (Singh, Sewa); Guru Panth Prakash of Ratan Singh Bhangu Bhangu 1993; Bhangu 2004), and Santokh Singh's *Gur-pratap Suraj Granth* of 1843 – and those of the younger Sahibzadas of Guru Gobind Singh, who thus followed into the footsteps of their great-great-grandfather Guru Arjan and grandfather Guru Tegh Bahadur (Grewal 2011:202; for *Gurbilas* and *Shahidbilas* literature see: Grewal 2011:118-132; Malhotra 2016: 242-49). Notably, the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, in the historic Guruship tradition, was preceded by the martyrdom of Bhai Mati Das, Sati Das, and Diyala – all long-term companions of the Guru – 'before his very eyes' (Singh, Ganda 1977: 58). They were subjected into extreme torture in an attempt 'to frighten the Guru into submission', and to bring him into the fold of Islam (Singh, Ganda 1977: 58; Singh, Gajinder 2004: 45; see also Singh, Trilochan 1967). Associating the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur with that of the fifth Master, Guru Arjan, who was also his grandfather, Ganda Singh wrote: While Mati Das was bound between two pillars and was swan in twain, and Dila was boiled to death in a cauldron of water, Sati Das was roasted alive with cotton wrapped round his body. But as no fear or favour, offered by the Mughal nobles, could prevail upon the Guru to renounce his faith and accept Islam, Muhammad Ahsan Ijad tells, he was executed in the Chandni Chowk on November 11, 1675 (Maghar Sudi 5, 1732 Vikrami). Thus did Guru Tegh Bahadur lay down his life as a *martyr at the altar of dharma* and, in the words of his son Guru Gobind Singh, he gave up his life but *surrendered not the conviction of his heart. This was in keeping with spirit of the fifth Nanak Guru Arjan who had accepted to be tortured to death in defence of his faith and was the first martyr of the Sikh-panth* (Singh, Ganda 1977: 58-9; emphasis in italics added).

Other than these early instances of the spiritual domain of martyrdom of Guru Arjan, Guru Tegh Bahadur, two younger Sahibzada (Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh) of Guru Gobind Singh, Bhai Mati Das, Sati Das, and Dila, the Sikh history is suffused with innumerable instances of martyrdom by Sikhs both in its spiritual and terrestrial domain, who sacrificed their lives 'knowingly and voluntarily... for altruistic causes and noble ends' (Singh, Hakam 2004:39;). Most notable among them that come to mind are: the two elder Sahibzadas of Guru Gobind Singh, Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh, who attained martyrdom while fighting in the battle of Chamkaur Sahib, the two younger ones who laid down their lives at Sirhind in Defence of their faith, the three of the panj piare (five beloved), the forty Singhs who attained martyrdom fighting at Chamkaur Sahib and also forty Muktas who also attained martyrdom fighting at Muktsar Sahib,

(Contd. on next page)

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(Continue from page 6)

Banda Singh Bahadur, Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Deep Singh, Bhai Tara Singh, Bhai Bota Singh, Bhai Garja Singh, Bhai Taru Singh, Bhai Lachman Singh, Bhai Subeg Singh, Bhai Mahtab Singh, Bhai Dalip Singh, Nihang Gurbakhsh Singh and many more who sacrificed their lives for the cause of humanity. (cf. Singh, Hakam 2004:39; Grewal 2011:188 & 210; see also Singh, Giani Bhajan 1991; Singh, Bhagat Lakshman 1989).

The horrific persecution of Sikhs under the autocracy of the Mughals until the demise of their hold on Punjab was not only a saga of unheard brutalities in the history of mankind, but also of new heights of martyrdoms attained by the lovers of Guru and God standing witness to the purity of their faith as well as forsaking their lives in battlefields for righteous deeds (Singh, Hardit 2004: 65). Based on the principle of unconditional surrender in the name of Guru and in agreement with the will (*bhana*) of God, martyrdom in the Sikh tradition became a distinct genre (Grewal 2011:196-201). Embedded in the principles of 'to forfeit life rather than faith', and 'to lay down one's life in the righteous cause', martyrdom in Sikhism unlike the Abrahamic tradition rose above the dynamics of rewards in this world and beyond. Though, the term *shahid* travelled into the Sikh world, as discussed before, from the Muslim tradition, which in turn was a motley of Jewish and Hellenic elements, 'besides of course, what the soil and tradition of Arabia lend to it,' but over the years, it has evolved its own unique existence so much so that one of the twelve Sikh missals or federating clans came to be known as *Misal Shahheedan* – fraternity of the Martyrs – and the spot where Nihang Gurbakhsh Singh and a handful of his fellow Singhs were cremated, after they achieved *shahadat* defending the Darbar Sahib (Amritsar) from an overwhelming army of Afghans invaders, a *shahidgarj* was constructed to remember where they have 'given their heads for the sake of their faith' (Talib 1990: 220 and 225; Grewal 2011 202 & 212).

The uniqueness of martyrdom in the Sikh tradition can also be known from the fact that it gave rise to a new form of literature called *Shahidbilas* (a poetical work written in praise of a martyr), the first of its kind since the birth of the Khalsa. Martyrs and the places of their martyrdom (monuments) came to acquire central stage in the Khalsa tradition which was, in fact, continuation of the 'the Sikh tradition' commencing with the teachings of Guru Nanak and exemplified in the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, "the first 'modern' martyr of India", to borrow the expression from J.P.S. Uberoi, whose "life, work and death represented all that Guru Nanak had founded and anticipated" (Grewal 2011: 191). The precepts of Guru Nanak, the founder of the faith, taken forward through the maiden martyrdom of Guru Arjan, were meticulously followed in the martyrdoms of Guru Tegh Bahadur, four Sahibzadas and a large number of the followers of the faith who sacrificed their lives at the altar of their faith as well as righteous cause as true believers in the teachings of the truthful house of Baba Nanak and as emissaries of his egalitar-

ian way of life, free from the binaries of 'we and others' and immersed in the 'word' of Guru and the hukam of Akal Purkh.

CONCLUSION

My key argument in this study expounds the difference between the Sikh and Abrahamic conceptions of martyr and martyrdom. The Sikh conception of *shahadat* distinguishes itself from the Abrahamic tradition of martyrdom in the sense that unlike the latter, it does not have an equivalent to the 'guilt principle' dynamic in Christianity which arises from a sense of indebtedness for the sacrifice made by Christ for mankind, and neither is there a 'promise principle' as in the Islamic case of rewards for such acts. *Shahadat*/martyrdom in Sikhism is unambiguously, and solely, based on the key principle of pure love towards Guru and Akal Purakh as is reiterated in the sacred scripture – the SGGS.

Another key argument in the study revolves around the tradition of martyrdom in Sikh faith, which got deeply ingrained in the collective memory of the Panth that finally became an integral part of the institution of the Khalsa. Available scholarship offers divergent interpretations emanating from two principles, but opposing standpoints – Sikh tradition, steeped in Sikh ideology, and historical evidence based on contemporary and 'near-contemporary' sources – about the origin of the concept of martyrdom and actual happening of this contentious but highly venerated episteme.

Groomed in the spiritual teachings of the founder of the Sikh faith, Baba Guru Nanak, and followed by nine preceptors down the line of the tradition and institution of historic Guruship, *shahadat*, actually an Islamic principle, travelled eastward with the advent of Mughal rule in India, eventually got absorbed into the Punjabi language and popularised in its native folklore by *dhadis* (traditional bards). Guru Arjan, the fifth Master, who sacrificed his mortal frame for the purity of his faith – a cardinal principle for the vindication of *shahadat* (martyrdom), became the epitome of the phenomenon of *shahadat* in Sikhism. Given the choice to embrace Islam or face execution according to the Mughal law of *yasa*, as recorded in *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, authored by emperor Jahangir himself, who also passed the horrific execution orders, Guru Arjan preferred the latter – a clear case of 'death for a cause', a testimony of his being the first martyr and vindication of the attainment of martyrdom.

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# Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia: Founder of the Historic Ad Dharm Movement

**B** Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia is to Punjab what Mahatma Jyotirao Phule is to Maharashtra. If the Maharashtra Dalit movement owes its origin to Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, the Punjab Dalit movement is similarly indebted to Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia. Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was influenced by the writings of Thomas Paine, the famous English-born American political activist, theorist, philosopher and revolutionary of the nineteenth century. Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia also learnt his lessons of equality and freedom from the proclaimed democratic and liberal values of the United States of America wherein he came into contact, during his sojourn, with the revolutionary freedom fighters popularly known as Ghadri Babas, of the historic Ghadar Lehar. This further cemented his resolve to fight for a dignified life for the masses by liberating India from the clutches of the British Empire, and to establish in its place democratic and egalitarian home rule with equality and freedom for all irrespective of caste, class, creed, language, gender and regional differentiations.

Like his nineteenth century Maharashtrian counterpart who was also a revolutionary social thinker of the so-called lower castes, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia established the first school of its kind in his native village of Mugowal for the children of those self-same socially excluded sections of the society that later came to be designated Scheduled Castes (SC) under the Government of India (Scheduled Castes) order, 1936, which contained a list (or schedule) of castes throughout the British-administered provinces. He also faced stiff opposition, like his predecessor in Maharashtra, from the so-called upper/dominant castes of Punjab in his fierce struggle against oppressive structures of domination including untouchability – the most egregious one among them. Following into the footsteps of his revolutionary Ghadrite leadership in the United States of America, he aspired to both fight against the caste-based social evil of untouchability and to replace it with an all-encompassing social freedom, as well as to join the fight to free the subjugated India and return to it its political freedom.

Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, a household name among the Scheduled Castes (SC) of Punjab, was the main architect of the formation of Ad Dharm movement in the province of Punjab in the mid 1920s. He literally took the movement to the doorsteps of the untouchables in the region and soon emerged as a cult figure of the lower castes in Punjab. Like the

Satyashodak Samaj movement in Maharashtra, the Ad Dharm movement soon became a household name among the SCs of Punjab. It was for the first time in the forgotten history of the lower castes in the state that a golden opportunity knocked at their doors to get them united on a common and distinct platform under the leadership of their fellow-travellers to fight for the most sought after goal of dignified life and to collectively press their long-pending claim for a

of Guru Ravidass, who was already well known among the lower castes of Punjab, was systematically projected in order to concretize the newly conceived lower caste cultural space in the region. His struggle against the system of untouchability, anchored in an enlightened vision of *Begampura*, at a time when no one could dare to speak for the socially excluded sections of the society, made him a messianic figure of the lower castes. Under the adept leader-



share in the local structures of power. The Ad Dharm movement was the only movement of its kind in the Northwestern region of India that aimed at creating a dignified space for the lower castes by constructing a distinct socio-cultural and political SC identity through religious regeneration, spiritual empowerment, cultural transformation, and political assertion. The main objective of the Ad Dharm movement was to carve out a separate identity for those who were socially excluded from all spheres of mainstream power structures. It was during this movement that the image

ship of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, the Ad Dharm movement had tactically cashed in on his mass appeal by using his pictures as its emblem, reciting his bani, and narrating legends about him as illustrations of the power, pride, and glory of oppressed segments of society.

Ensnared in the glory of the messianic image of Guru Ravidass, the Ad Dharm movement, despite all sorts of pressures and local resistance, succeeded in prevailing upon the British regime to declare a separate religion (Ad Dharm – primeval religion) for the lower castes in Punjab.

Consequently a total of 418,789 persons registered themselves as Ad Dharmis in the Punjab census of 1931. Eventually, this newly found religion of the lower castes dwindled into a separate



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caste – Ad Dharmi – that now comprised 11.48 per cent of the SC population of East Punjab as per 2011 Census. Since then, Ad Dharmis have organized themselves into various Guru Ravidass Sabhas (societies) and established a large number of Ravidass Deras, which began emerging in Punjab in the early twentieth century. The emergence of Ravidass Deras is often seen as an index of rising Ravidassia identity in the state. There are over sixty Deras in Punjab that have an exclusively Ravidassia identity. A vernacular field study completed in 2003 put their number as around 100. Since then, many more such Deras have come into existence in East Punjab. More than half of the Ravidass Deras are located in four districts – Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, Kapurthala and Nawanshahr of the Doaba region of Punjab lying between two rivers: Sutlej and Beas – also known for highest concentration of SC population. Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia belonged to Hoshiarpur district. Seth Kishan Dass of Boota Mandi, another reputed name in the Ad Dharm movement, belonged to Jalandhar district. Hazara Ram Piplanwala, Hari Ram Pandori Bibi, and Sant Ram Azad, the other original founding members of the Ad Dharm movement, were also from Hoshiarpur district.

The phenomenon of Ravidass Deras is equally popular among the SC diaspora as well. They have established Ravidass Deras in different parts of the world. Some of the most prominent among them are in Canada in the cities of Vancouver, Calgary, Brampton, Toronto, and Montreal; in the United States in the cities of New York, Sacramento, Pittsburgh, Seattle, Fresno, Fremont, Houston, Selma, and Austin; and in the United Kingdom in the cities of Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Bradford, Coventry,

(Contd. on next page)

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# Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia: Founder of the Historic Ad Dharm Movement

(Continue from page 9)

Derby, Lancaster, Southall, Southampton, Kent, and Bedford. Since 2010, many Ravidass temples/gurdwaras have also been built in Austria, Italy, France, Germany, Spain, Holland, New Zealand, Greece and Lebanon.

Different both from the Hindu temples and Sikh gurdwaras, Ravidass Deras provide an alternative religious domain where their followers need not hide their identity and meekly suffer caste-based social exclusion. Their distinctiveness also lies in the fact that they neither take refuge in any of the mainstream religions nor emulate the dominant socio-cultural ethos of upper-castes.

On the contrary, they not only proudly distinguish themselves from the mainstream religious systems, but also contest the long imposed supremacy of other castes. These Deras, in fact, have been functioning as missions to sensitise lower castes and to facilitate their empowerment. The entire array of religious and cultural activities in Ravidass Deras revolve around the teachings and life of Guru Ravidass, and his statues/figures are installed and worshipped in the sanctum sanctorum of almost all such Deras. In some Deras affluent devotees have donated golden *palkis* (canopies) for the purpose of covering statues/figures of Guru Ravidass.

Free food (langar/community kitchen) and state-of-the-art medical health facilities are also provided in some of these Deras. The social developmental reach of Ravidass Deras is not confined to the health facilities alone – some Deras have opened English medium model middle/high schools, complete with modern teaching technology. To underline their separate identity, Ravidass Deras have formulated their separate rituals, ceremonies, slogans, symbols, auspicious dates, customs, *ardas* (prayer), *kirtan* (musical rendering of sacred hymns), religious festivals and iconography.

It was the Ad Dharm movement that paved the way for the emancipation and empowerment of the lowest of the low not only in Punjab, but also became a role model for the radical Dalit movement throughout India. Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia stood with Babasaheb Dr B. R. Ambedkar like a rock during his struggle for separate electoral status for the Depressed Classes (later designated as Scheduled Castes) at the London Round Table conferences. Again it was this very Dalit movement that gave SC a counter-public in the form of their distinct religion called "Ad Dharm". Another equally great achievement of the Ad Dharm movement was that under the able leadership of the Babu Mangu Ram

Mugowalia, it contested Punjab Provincial assembly elections in 1937 & 1946, which made the SC of Punjab equally an important stake-holder in the state legislature, perhaps for the first time in the history of the political power structure of the colonial India. Ad Dharm had its headquarters at Jalandhar city and was financially supported by Seth Kishan Das of Botan Mandi where Babasaheb Dr B.R. Ambedkar gave his first electoral address on October 27, 1951 as a prelude to the first general election in Independent India. The next day Babasaheb held mock parliamentary debate at the campus of DAV College Jalandhar where he addressed the students and the faculty together. In

this country. Liberate the Adi race by separating these seven crores. ... Our seven crore number enjoy no share at all. We reposed faith in Hindus and thus suffered a lot. Hindus turned out to be callous. Centuries ago, Hindus suppressed us; sever all ties with them. What justice can we expect from those who are the butchers of the Adi race. The time has come; be cautious, now the Government listens to appeals. With the support of a sympathetic Government, come together to save the race. Send members to the Councils so that our Qaum is strengthened again. British rule should remain forever. Make prayer before God. Except for this Government, no one is sympathetic

ened under the stewardship of Babasaheb Dr B.R. Ambedkar. If one has to make sense of socio-political consciousness among the SC community in Punjab, s/he has to refer to the pioneer work done by Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia that he commenced after returning from the United States of America (USA) after going through hard times at places on foreign lands. The story of Ad Dharm and its originator, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, would remain incomplete without acknowledging the seminal contribution made by Mark Juergensmeyer, reputed Social Anthropologist and Political Scientist of the University of California, Santa Barbara, the USA, who did his PhD thesis on this

very movement, which finally culminated into his classic: "Religious Rebels in the Punjab: The Social Vision of Untouchables". It was after the publication of his field-based study of the movement and its founding father that the people of the region came to know the significant role played by Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia towards the upward social mobility of the lower castes in Punjab.

In recognition of his invaluable contribution in the Ghadar movement, Dr. T. V. Nagendra Prasad, the Consulate General of India, San Francisco (CA), installed the picture of Babu Mangu Ram Mu-



fact, the tremendous response to the call of Babasaheb Dr B. R. Ambedkar from the politically mature land of Punjab was the direct outcome of the fertile political ground prepared by the Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia.

The Ad Dharm movement began its historic journey on its maiden Conference, organised on June 11-12, 1926 at the ground of the Ad Dharm School, Mahilpur, Hoshiarpur district, Punjab. In the poster announcing the first annual conference of the Ad Dharm movement, Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia, along with Swami Shudranand and Babu Thakur Chand, devoted the entire space to the hardships faced by the *Moolnivas* (original inhabitants) at the hands of the caste Hindus. He also made an appeal to the *Moolnivas* to come together to chalk out a programme for their liberation and uplift. Addressing them as brothers, he said: "We are the real inhabitants of this country and our religion is Ad Dharm. Hindu Qaum came from outside to deprive us of our country and enslave us. At one time we reigned over 'Hind'. We are the progeny of kings; Hindus came down from Iran to Hind and destroyed our Qaum. They deprived us of our property and rendered us nomadic. They razed our forts and houses, and destroyed our history. We are seven crores in numbers and are registered as Hindus in

towards us. Never consider ourselves as Hindus at all; remember that our religion is Ad Dharm" (*Kaumi Udarian*: 1986: 21-22). Keen readers of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia have observed that he was conflicted on the issue of the British Raj – on the one hand he feared even greater oppression under Hindu majoritarian rule than under the British –whom he also viewed as possible partners in facilitating a more equal Indian society – but on the other hand he aspired for the dignity of national independence, which necessitated the removal of the British. This remained a recurring paradox in his political approach till the achievement of Indian independence in 1947. In his brilliant article entitled *Achhut da Swaal* (Untouchability Question), Shaheed Bhagat Singh supported the Ad Dharm leadership in its tirade against the caste system, but at the same time had cautioned them to keep their distance from the British.

Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia played a dominant role in chiseling the distinct markers of the separate SC identity in Punjab. He restored the lower castes their lost heroes, gurus—Bhagwan Valmik Ji, Satguru Namdev Ji, Satguru Kabir Sahib and Satguru Ravidass Ji – rich but lost cultural heritage, and brought forth an urge to become rulers themselves. It was this very urge, which got further sharp-

gowardia, presented by Prem Kumar Chumber, Editor-in-Chief, Ambedkar Times and Desh Doaba Weeklies, in the Ghadar Memorial Hall, 5 Wood Street San Francisco (CA) during Ghadar Mela celebration on July 24, 2022. The Ghadar Mela was organised by the Consulate General of India, San Francisco (CA), in the memory of the Ghadri Babas and their great vision for the freedom, unity and prosperity of India. Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia was one of five Ghadri Babas who were assigned the herculean task of taking weapons from North America to India on SS-Maverick Ship to liberate India from the British rule. He was captured on board SS Maverick along with his other accomplices and eventually sentenced to death. However, destiny saved Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia somehow and finally he was able to return to his native village after spending many years incognito at different places. Appreciating the act of installation of the picture of Babu Mangu Ram Mugowalia in the Ghadar Memorial Hall, Mark Juergensmeyer was of the opinion: "Very nice! It is an appropriate and long overdue recognition of the important role of Baba Mangu Ram in the Ghadar movement, and I'm glad that he is receiving this belated recognition."



# Desecration of Ambedkar Statues – Civil Response

Babasaheb Ambedkar is a phenomenon which is both easy and hard to understand with the changing political and socio-cultural landscape of the country. On one hand more and more statues/busts/memorials of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar are coming up not only in India but also abroad. It is gratifying to know that many cities and provinces in the UK, the USA and Canada among others have proclaimed April 14, birthday of Babasaheb Ambedkar, as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Day of Equality. During the life time of Babasaheb Ambedkar neither the governments of the day and nor the socio-cultural outfits and their leaderships accepted and

seems, have their reservations in accepting Babasaheb Ambedkar and giving him the space he deserved. That is why I said that it is both easy and difficult to understand the iconic figure, Babasaheb Ambedkar.

My immediate provocation to

sites in both urban and rural areas of Punjab publically owned by the likes of Pannus and some extremists and separatists belonging to the Sikh community is increasingly becoming worrisome and matter of concern. It must be stopped and checked immediately both by the

belonging to the so called S w a r a n s (upper castes) should come out and challenge the anti-



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social and anti-national elements. It is needed not only to maintain the law and order at the affected areas but also to save the socio-political

accommodated Babasaheb, one of the greatest sons of contemporary India. With the pleasant political fallout of the Constitution of India, thoughtfully made and adopted by our forefathers led by Babasaheb Ambedkar himself, the political leadership started to understand the importance of the icon in 1970s onwards. Babu Kanshi Ram dragged Babasaheb Ambedkar from the academic and intellectual realm to the social grass-roots of the country. By now Ambedkar has become a much sought after entity not only in the corridors of power but also a 'not to be ignored' personality in the socio-political circles of the country. The paradox of the emerging situation is that the upper crust of the caste-ridden society and their political outfits still, it

write emanated from the current news about desecration of the statues of Ambedkar in Punjab. Though this kind of anti-social activities had been taking place in other parts of the country as the empowerment of dalits, brought out by Babasaheb and the Constitution of India, is not digestible easily by the Thekedars of the society suffering from Manuwadi thinking yet it is time to study and understand the reasons and motivations of vested interests like Pannus and others to execute their nefarious agenda against India that is Bharat under the guise and pretext of Ambedkar' Constitution and shatter the social fabric of not only Punjab but beyond.

The recent events of desecration of statues of Ambedkar at various

authorities and also by the socio-cultural outfits like SGPC, RSS, Dera Beas, Dera Ram Rahim Singh, Dera Nirankar, inter alia and also the civil society at large. Unfortunately, what has been noticed so far is that only dalits and their socio-cultural outfits have been criticizing and challenging the anti-social and anti-national activities and agenda of the vested interests as if Babasaheb belonged to them alone and not to 'We the people of India'. According to the media reports some dalit activists belonging to SAD (A) and Congress Party and also of BJP have joined the protests with regard to Nangal-Phillour desecration a few days ago. The political parties who fall on each other to own Ambedkar and his legacy to attract vote banks and the civil society

edifice of Bharat. Sitting on the fence and claim Babasaheb for selfish ends is not the answer. As regards the law abiding followers of Babasaheb they have made their resolve public and rightly so in the Punjabi folk lore which is getting viral – Jo Butt Babasaheb Da Todu; ohdian Lattan Todage; Jo Butt Ambedkar Da Todu Ohdian Bahvan Todange – Jo Butt Bhim Rao Da Todu Ohdi Dhaoun Marodange.

I conclude this off the cuff piece with a poetic assertion of AllamaIqbal for the benefit of the Thekedars of the society –

eflt n rlsck nh 'lc Hj eabZlu dh gjdr okylaus  
eu viuk i g l u k i k i h g\$ cjl laeuekt h cu uk l dk  
bdcky cMk mnskd g\$ eu clrlaealg yrk g\$  
xqrlj dk ; sxlth rlscklj fdjnlj dk xlt h cu uk l dk



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RANDEEP SINGH

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## Sri Guru Ravidass Temple Pittsburg - Upcoming Programs



**Guru Piyari Saadh Sangat Ji:**

**Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji KI Fateh!**

The following programs will be celebrated  
at the Gurdwara Sahib:

**June 27-28-29, 2025**

**Pittsburg Gurughar's 40th Anniversary**

Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha will be celebrating 40th anniversary of Sri Guru Ravidass Temple Pittsburg on Sunday, June 29, 2025, with great enthusiasm.

Akhand Path will start on Friday 6/27/2025 at 10:00 AM and will be concluded with Bhog ceremony on Sunday, 6/29/2025, followed by Kirtan Deewan. Jatha of Bhai Kapoor Singh ji - Kanne Wale, along with Jatha of Giani Balwinder Singh ji will delight Sangat with Shabad Kirtan.

Nishan Sahib Chola Sewa will be hosted by S. Balbir Singh ji on Saturday, June 28, 2025 at 11:00 AM. Kirtan Deewan will be from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM on Saturday.

There will be a health camp on Sunday from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Doctors and nurses will be available to help with any health questions or issues. We are always looking for medical professionals to help with this free community service. Please contact Ramesh Suman at 925.366.3618 or Dilbag Singh at 209-834-4641, for information.

Path and Langar Sewa will be hosted by Guru Ki Sangat. For stalls or any langar Sewa, please contact Chairman Vinod Kumar at 408-718-2506 or President Sunita Singh at 415-233-3319. Please contact us if you would like to volunteer for Langar Sewa, Jorha Sewa, maintenance or any other Sewa.

We are extremely thankful to our founding members for creating this wonderful place of worship for the community. We are also thankful to Sangat and all the Sewadars, this could not have been possible without their continued, tireless Sewa and support. With Guru Sahib's blessings and guidance, this Gurughar has been continually making progress since June 2, 1985, the grand opening day. This is a testimony of the love and unity of our community.

We look forwards to celebrating this major milestone with all of you. May Guru Sahib bless His Sangat with peace, love and unity.

**"NANAK NAM CHARDI KALA TERE BHANE SARBAT DA BHALA"**

**"NANAK NAM CHARDI KALA TERE BHANE SARBAT DA BHALA"**

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**Gen. Secretary  
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