

## GURU TEGH BAHADUR AS THE HARBINGER OF HUMANITY

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*“No one is my enemy, and no one is stranger. I get along with everyone.”  
(Guru Granth Sahib, p.1299)*

### ABSTRACT

*Sikhism is based on humanistic and universal values of the purest form. Human freedom and dignity, self-realization and self-confidence, service and sacrifice have been the essential elements of its ethos. Humanism recognizes the entire humanity as one single race, free from racial barrier, free from caste and gender bias. As a prophet of humanism the ninth guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur's life is an example of selfless service and a firm stand against the atrocities of Mugal Empire to sustain faith in the philosophy of humanism. His sacrifice underlines one of the most fundamental principles of human existence: ensuring the right of everyone to breathe free. As a harbinger of humanity, life and teachings of Guru Tegh Bahadurji are still lighting our path. Ironically we have surrounded ourselves with the darkness of ignorance, religious intolerance, discriminatory attitude towards others on the basis of caste, colour, gender and religion which in turn is defeating the basic soul of humanity and humanism as envisioned by Guru Tegh Bahadurji.*

**Keywords:** Humanism, Harbinger, Guru Tegh Bahadur, Sikhism, Sacrifice

It was around a century before the popular quotation, “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it”, attributed to French writer, deist and philosopher Voltaire, that the ninth guru demonstrated it literally.

In the words of Noel King of the University of California,(2019) “Guru Tegh Bahadur’s martyrdom was the first ever martyrdom for human rights in the world.”

As reported by The Tribune, Wednesday 18th November 2020 ‘The Chief Khalsa Diwan (CKD) acclaimed the New York (the US) Assembly for recognizing Guru Tegh Bahadur as the protector of human rights and the Sikh community for its selfless deeds worldwide, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Members of the World Sikh Parliament’s Councils for Religion along with Civil and Human Rights organised the 345th martyrdom day and the 400th birth anniversary of Guru Tegh Bahadur at the Gurdwara Sikh Center of New York recently. On the occasion, state and city officials from New York joined members of the Sikh community and recognised Guru Tegh Bahadur’s sacrifices to uphold human rights and justice.

As quoted by our late President Pranab Mukherjee (2016) on the eve of the martyrdom day of Guru Tegh Bahadur” Guru Tegh Bahadur’s Shaheedi Din is an occasion for all of us to remember the glory of his sacrifice.” He said that Guru Tegh Bahadurji was an embodiment of humility who transcended all barriers of caste, creed, race, religion and gender. “Let us on this scared day rededicate ourselves to the philosophy of selfless service to all. Let hatred and violence find no place in our thoughts and actions,May the sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadurji inspire us to unite all humanity into one common brotherhood”.

Gurbachan Singh, general secretary of Punjab Human Rights Organization, said that lessons from Guru Tegh Bahadur’s martyrdom assume more significance as human rights issues are turning much more serious across the world. “At a philosophical level also, he has beautifully explained the idea of accepting death fearlessly and naturally in his hymns. His hymns can inspire even those in deep despair,” he said. “He was rightly called Hind Di Chadar (saviour of Hindus and their faith),”

As quoted by a member of Delhi Sikh

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Gurudwara Management Committee (DSGMC) “It is perhaps not imprudent to call him the greatest humanitarian this world has ever seen. No one else sacrificed himself for the people of another religion.” (2019).

He further quoted “For him and even for Guru Nanakji, the religious question was about the extent of one’s faith, beyond the externalities associated with the religion. They emphasized love, charity, brotherhood, and peace over and beyond mere tokens. This is one of the reasons, the gurus refused to wear the janeu (sacred thread of Hindus)”. In today’s time, he adds, such a lesson becomes even more important. “We see people yelling themselves hoarse over extremely inconsequential matters and more importantly, in today’s time, religious freedom has become even more constricted and this is perhaps the best time to remember Guru Tegh Bahadur”.

### A Brief Life Sketch

Guru Tegh Bahadur was the ninth of the ten Gurus of the religion of Sikhism (1621- 1675). The youngest of the five sons of the sixth Sikh guru, Guru Hargobind, he was trained in the martial arts of swordsmanship and horse riding from a young age. He also received religious training from Baba Buddha and Bhai Gurdas. He grew up to be a brave young man and accompanied his father and other Sikhs in their battles and displayed bravery in the wars against the Mughal forces. His father gave him the title of “Tegh Bahadur”, meaning “Mighty of Sword”, in recognition of his bravery. However, after one particularly bloody battle in 1634 at Kartarpur, he turned to the path of renunciation and meditation.

Guru Tegh Bahadurji had a versatile personality, a warrior, family man with social commitment and a preacher of great understanding and vision. He is revered for the supreme sacrifice he gave to protect the religious rights of the Hindus. He is known as Hind-di-Chaadar (shield of India) for resisting the forced conversions of Hindus in Kashmir to Islam. By giving up his life for the rights of the Hindus, he became the first person in history to sacrifice his life to save the freedom of another religion.

### Teachings of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji

Guru Tegh Bahadur composed 116 *shabads* and 15 *ragas*, and his teachings have been included in the *Adi Granth*. Let’s have some of his quotes and the teachings derived from them:

1. *“One who grieves not in misery and delights not in pleasure, who is free from fear and attachment, and for whom gold and dust are the same and who has renounced both praising and blaming (flattery and slander) and is immune to greed, worldly attachments and pride....when the all Merciful Guru blesses a disciple with His Grace, only then does the disciple attain this blessed spiritual state and blends (merges) with the Lord as water with water.”*

Guru Tegh Bahadur preached the conviction it takes to be indifferent to misery and happiness, to get rid of vices like flattery and allegation, and every other worldly pleasure. It is when one has mastered the art of self-control that he/she can truly be spiritual.

2. *“O saints, renounce the Ego, and always flee from lust, wrath and evil company. One should consider pain and pleasure, honour and dishonour the same. One should renounce both praise and blame and even the search for salvation. This is a very difficult path and rare is a (Gurmukh) pious person who knows how to tread it.”*

Guru Tegh Bahadur showed the path of divinity to his disciples by teaching them to overcome greed, desire, ego and pain.

3. *“One who vanquishes his ego and beholds the Lord as the Sole Doer of all things, that person has attained ‘Jiwan Mukti’ (is liberated while living), know this as the real truth, says Nanak.”*

He guided his followers towards the path of peace. Guru Tegh Bahadur taught the world to be content with their life, as everything in the world is “Nanak’s doing”. He spread the idea of attaining *Jiwan Mukti* by making peace with every life-situation.

4. *“True Realisation of the actual nature of this*

*material world, its perishable, transitory and illusory aspects best dawns on a person in suffering.”*

The Guru revealed the true reason behind human suffering to his followers. It is in times of despair and misery that one gets to see the ephemeral nature of worldly pleasures, and only then can one truly learn to value greater things in life.

5. *“Give up your head, but forsake not those whom you have undertaken to protect. Sacrifice your life, but relinquish not your faith.”*

Guru Tegh Bahadur was a merciful saviour of the weak, and that is what he preached. He taught his disciples to protect the ones who need protection, even if it comes at the cost of one's own life.

6. *“Why go to search forests (to find Him). He who dwells in all hearts but remains ever pure, pervades thy heart also. Just as fragrance fills the rose and reflection the mirror, the Lord pervades all without a break; search Him inside thee. The Guru hath revealed this knowledge that the Aum pervades inside and outside. Saith Nanak, without knowing thyself the scum of doubt will not be removed.”*

The Guru pressed on the omnipresence of the Almighty. The Lord lives within us, and one only needs to look within himself to connect with him. He preached that the symbol of universe, Aum (Om), is everywhere, inside you, outside you, inside me and outside me.

7. *Night and day, for the sake of Maya, the mortal wanders constantly. ...  
If you yearn for eternal peace, then seek the Sanctuary of the Lord. ...  
Why do you take such false pride in yourself?  
You must know that the world is just a dream.  
...  
This is the way of the world, O Nanak; nothing is stable or permanent. ...  
The Naam remains; the Holy Saints remain;  
the Guru, the Lord of the Universe, remains  
(SGGS 1426, Salok Mehela 9 bani).*

Happiness is not to be found in searching for aspects of Maya – that leads to nothing. Hold the

love – devotional love – for the Guru in mind, and your direction will be clear:

Guru Tegh Bahadur was ascetic in nature and spiritually inclined with less involvement in worldly affairs. He rooted for peace and stayed away from conflict when he could. Yet he remained true to his duty. His teachings guide mankind towards indifference to both misery and happiness in pursuit of praise of the Almighty.

On Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji's supreme sacrifice to champion fundamental human rights for all, his son, the tenth Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, wrote:

*Thheekar forh dilees sir, Prabh purkeea payaan,  
Tegh Bahadur see kirya, karee nakinahooaan.  
Tegh Bahaadur ke chalat, bhayo jagat kosok,  
Hai hai hai sabh jag bhayo, jai jaijaisurluk.*

*Casting off his bodily vesture on the head of Suzerain of Delhi, Tegh Bahadur departed to the Realm of God.*

*None who came into the world performed such glorious deeds as him.*

*On his departure, there was dismay in the world.*

*This world cried, “Alas, Alas”.*

*The Heavens rang with greetings of victory.*

*(Guru Gobind Singh)*

## Conclusion

To conclude, it is easy to preach then practice. But the sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur refuted this saying. It is difficult to find an example that devoted his entire life for the service of oppressed and helpless people and also showed them the path of enlightenment. His charismatic personality and his philosophy of non-violence, non retaliation, truthfulness has no match in history. As quoted by Ex-Chief Minister of Punjab S. Parkash Singh Badal (2014) “ Our real homage to the great guru would be to follow his teachings in true spirit and dedicate ourselves to serve society, especially the poor and downtrodden, with dedication and missionary zeal, rising above the parochial consideration of caste, colour, creed and religion.”

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