



My Sovereign: Guru Gobind Singh Sahib Harinder Singh

The Guru (perfection) dwells where the morality-ethics is beyond sins and virtues, deeds are not measured by world standards, thoughts on birth and death are not shadowed, time-movements of previous lives end, the Grace is the grandest magic and no gods or fascinations are needed other than the Grace.

So, how does one capture the life and legacy of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, the Sovereign of the sovereigns? How do I even attempt to praise the “Splendor of Immortal Compassion” (*jumlā faiz-i-nūr*) who inaugurated the *Guru Khalsa Panth* and asked them to submit to the *Guru Granth Sahib*. I am not capable of the venture as Bhai Vir Singh dreamt him, Professor Puran Singh spirited him, Bhai Randhir Singh visualized him, Jathedar Jarnail Singh intoxicated him, or Bibi Balbir Kaurⁱ invoked him.

Guru Gobind Singh Sahib’s (*The Sovereign*) life cannot be grasped through study of chronological historical events, popular philosophical insights, standards of art or aesthetics, or contemporary psychology. It would be a grave mistake to do so for the directions his life took are beyond intellectual and mystical expansion.

The work of Bhai Nand Lal ‘Goya’ (*Goya*) dances constantly around the joy of *seeing* The Sovereign at certain levels of mind and heart. By developing the capacity to see the journey of The Sovereign in his being, was he able to finally *see* The Sovereign. It is love-born: “*Road to love is too long to go on foot / Turn head into feet to walk on the road to your lover.*”ⁱⁱⁱ

Goya’s word choice indicates The Sovereign’s formlessness and inspiration. These words transcend time and space to touch The Sovereign’s splendor; they are repeated with creative impulses, describing the aesthetic beauty of the Guru—the multiple dimensions of perfection in multiple dimensions; they capture the One Force reverberating through the Guru’s existence. These words are not borne simply of a poet’s knowledge, but from the grace of the Guru working through Goya’s thoughts and feelings. Goya went to Anandpur – City of Joy – to meet The Sovereign: “One glance from the Guru was enough. The bee went deep and slept in the rare fragrance of the white lotus. Bhai Nand Lal never left the presence after.”ⁱⁱⁱ The Sovereign opened his ambrosial lips and recited: “Delighted Nand Lal, now you have the power to endure and are Goya (the one who expresses) to have dialogue.”^{iv}

Goya presents to us the divine vibrations in *Zindginama*, *Joti Bigas*, and *Ganjnama* – originally all written in Persian. He helps us develop a common fervor of various spiritual dimensions through these words—words which are the worship themselves as they become the *bani* (revealed infinite wisdom), and the Sikhs for generations have revered them as such. These words form the vision: The Sovereign’s *bani*, the Khalsa (the archetype), Guru Granth Sahib (scriptural canon), journeys of martyrdom (multi-generational, torture, and imprisonments), worldly engagements and divine intensity.

Here are a few readings and reflections from Goya’s renderings which salute The Sovereign. Goya is doubt-free, logical, and truthful. He witnesses the history as it unfolds and surpasses mere philosophical and psychological tendencies. His words today are as fresh and inspired as they were then, transcending time and space, and the labor of love of no other scribe or poet could feel more appropriate on this day of joy and remembrance.

Guru Gobind Singh Sahib is the Tenth Guru Nanak Sahib. It is well established in the Guru Granth Sahib that all Gurus had the same divine wisdom (*jot*) and divine values (*jugat*). Bhai Gurdas (theologian and linguist par-excellence) elucidated that the first six Gurus were the same great beings with same infinite wisdom accessed by personally connecting with the highest awareness. The author of *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*

narrates the contemporary accounts of the Sikh faith, citing that the Sikhs of Guru Harirai Sahib addressed the Guru as the Seventh Embodiment (*mahal*) and the Seventh Nanak.

Goya presented the aforesaid Sikh doctrine of “all Gurus are Nanaks” as not only logical, but philosophical and historical. In *Joti Bigas*, I sense the graceful nearness to The Sovereign and in-depth unparalleled artful aesthetics. Goya takes refuge in meta-experiential wisdom, beyond singular, indescribable and outward dimensions.

Nanak is same as Angad,
Gracious and famous Amardas is same.
Same is Ramdas as is Arjun,
Supreme and kind Hargobind is same.
Same is Harirari the creator Guru,
to whom everyone’s reality is evident.
Same is the elevated Harikishan,
Who fulfills everyone’s wishes.
Same is Guru Teghbahadur,
His radiance blessed Gobind Singh.
Guru Gobind Singh is same as Guru Nanak,
His words are like pearls and diamonds.^v

In *Ganj Nama*, I am awed by the emphasis of each Guru as possessing the grand beauty of all ten Gurus. The fifth Sultanate of Guru Nanak is illuminating the first four torches with the Light of Truth.^{vi} Guru Hargobind Sahib is the elegance that produces the pleasing beauty of the five torches.^{vii}

Ganj Nama is not merely written testimony, but an epical narration of the Ten Gurus graced by The Sovereign. Goya was a fellow traveler of my Sovereign, and much more. He sees the first Nine Gurus through the eyes of the Tenth. Doctrinally, the Ten Gurus reveal themselves as the same Guru Nanak—Divine Light. Poetically, the Ten Gurus unfold themselves as the ten images of the Tenth Guru. If I feel the grace, vision, presence, life and lifestyle of the Tenth Guru, then a new consciousness will be borne. That high consciousness will allow me to witness the complete beauty of the Tenth Guru, and only then, will I be able to do justice to trans-wisdom ideals of the Tenth Sovereign.

Guru Gobind Singh Sahib is beyond the Aryan and Semitic prophets. Guru Nanak Sahib came to shower the divine blessings amidst mystical silence when the religions of the time had transformed into fascination, magic, figures, exclusivity, and customs. And it was in this historical moment that Guru Gobind Singh Sahib flowed with the Creator’s Voice, which the world heard through Guru Nanak Sahib. And that voice surrounded the hearts of humanity forever by establishing the third alternative lifestyle of the Khalsa Panth. Undoubtedly, Goya captured this meta-experiential perspective of The Sovereign which is beyond prophets, incarnates, gods, and goddesses in *Joti Bigas*:

All the Godly-persons, all the Prophets,
All the Sufis and all the Prohibitionists,
Bowing heads in humility at his portal,
Lying with their heads on his feet^{viii} ...
What are Arjun, Bhim, Rustam or Saam?
What are Asfand Yaar or Rama and Lakhshman?
There are thousands of Shivas and Ganeshas,
Paying obeisance at his feet in humility.^{ix}

The aforementioned mythological, historical or spiritual leaders were not incomplete as such, but in comparison to The Sovereign’s splendor and grace, they remained only regional singularities. Guru Gobind

Singh Sahib's prophet-genius, revelation and philosophy depicted in *Joti Bigas* and *Ganj Nama* had at least three creative dimensions: It broke the subpar world-discipline – perpetual idol-destroyer – to bring to life the unique glory of the superior world-discipline; it was a guarantor for those lost, but still searching for faith; and it was a sponsor which included all wanderers looking for the Beloved in the divine grace.^x

Guru Granth Sahib (lovingly *Gurbani*) is inseparable from the personality of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib. *Ganj Nama* and *Joti Bigas* pre-date the Guruship of Guru Granth Sahib. Consequently, Goya does not refer to *Gurbani* using the “Guru” title, but still considers *Gurbani* to be superior to other religious texts and revelations. He makes *Gurbani* integral to The Sovereign's identity:

“Purer than the purest sacred words.
Beyond the four Vedas and six Philosophies.”^{xi}

In other words, he shows the grandeur of *Gurbani* in The Sovereign's consciousness, which is higher than Vedas and Shastras. The Khalsa Panth, born from this *Gurbani*, is a different path than those derived from Aryan and Semitic cultures. And this Panth's greatest asset is the aesthetics in sync with the Tenth Guru's personality guaranteeing beauty for the whole humanity: “His words are aromatic for the Arabs and the Iranians. The west and the east are sparkling from his Light.”^{xii}

Before The Sovereign departed this Earth, the auspicious *Gurbani* was established as the Guru perpetually for the Khalsa Panth in 1708. No scriptural tradition has been elevated to the same level of perfection; it includes the vision of One Force of the ecumenical traditions in Semitic and Aryan civilizations. The infinite wisdom became the revered Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Gobind Singh Sahib is the inaugurator of the Khalsa Panth. The elusive moment, the scenario, the narrative, the duty, of the Khalsa's inauguration are not to be cherished without fathoming the Guru Nanak Sahib's advent. *Qaum-i-Mardan-i-Khuda* was established on this Earth as the Khalsa Panth, where Guru Gobind Singh Sahib's moral and ethical beauty was revealed:

Their realm is the Nation of the humble ones,
And both the domains are their adherents.
Nation of the submissive-ones, and the children of God,
All is perishable except God who is stable forever.^{xiii}

In *Zindgi Nama* (couplets 86-118), the imagery of the Khalsa Panth's contains several glimpses of an Ideal Person who transcends this world, like Nietzsche's Superman. The Sovereign's Ideal Person – the Khalsa – is touched by the elegance whose flight is beyond every measured perspective's limit, whose strength and development establishes its own principles, and whose experience is beyond popular or faddish spirituality. A Khalsa's morality and ethics, their education and spiritual experience are colored by “Garments of Divinity” (*libas-i-bandgī*) and are connected with “Assets of Life” (*daulat-i-jāvīd*). The Khalsa Panth has elements of meta-intangibility, meta-wisdom, and meta-beauty. The Sovereign is in every vein of the Khalsa Panth: “Every one of them is a pious person / Beautiful, kind-hearted and of amiable-nature. Do not relish anything except the Remembrance / No codes of conduct except the Divine Words.”^{xiv}

In the lap of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, martyrs of the Khalsa commonwealth are asleep, for they are on a journey from affliction to grace. Transformation from oppression to dignity is a natural process and, by offering a friendly hand to humanity, The Sovereign has brought the Divine refuge:

Guru Gobind Singh is clean-hearted and above malice.
Guru Gobind Singh is the truth and the mirror of truthfulness.
Guru Gobind Singh is the Truth's true existence.
Guru Gobind Singh is the dervish and the sovereign.^{xv}

On Vaisakhi day, the servant-leadership was institutionalized as the way of the *sovereigns-en-masse* via *Amrit* prepared by the *Khanda*. *Amrit*, for it reminds the initiate to become like the Immortal by confronting death, and *Khanda*, for its double-edge sword reminds of a lifestyle beyond duality. No prophet or king deemed their mentor to be the equal of the protégé in either the Aryan or Semitic tradition. The Khalsa Panth was given the Guruship in 1699 for all time to come, the revered Guru Khalsa Panth.

Guru Gobind Singh Sahib is the Sovereign of the Sovereigns. The Sovereign's art and rules of war are not subservient to use of armed force: "To conquer both the worlds, He does not need the sword and the spear."^{xxvi} The battles of The Sovereign unveil the elegance and the justice needed to establish the Divine Sultanate. Higher standards of war are to be discovered in the campaigns for justice and rights: "Guru Gobind Singh is artful with the sword for he is nectar for the life and the heart."^{xxvii} Narrowness or grandness of creation and ideas is dependent on how the justice is perceived. When it becomes "just us," it is not justice! And the cost of death is dependent on the interpretation of this justice: it is not worth living as slaves regardless of the comforts. Thus, winning the battle of ideas was more important to the Guru than the mortal life.

Indians like Gandhi and Tagore^{xxviii} cannot appreciate the Sovereign not continuing the old knowledge of religious violence of war, the old image of history, and popular stories of magic. These old ways were destroyed and a new flow of original justice was born with only one goal: freedom, breaking shackles of religious and political domination, *here and now*. The Sovereign is the embodiment of revolutionary morality and ethics, justice, and praise: "He is the shine of truth and faith. He is the brightness of the countenance of justice."^{xxix}

All temporal and celestial beings revel in remembrance of The Sovereign and his creed is more fortunate than any other belief; an epic comparison to the other earthly authorities shows there is no other like him: Kaiser (Roman emperor), Khakans (Chinese and Turkish emperors), Kisras, Kaoos, Fools, Kioomers, and Jamsheds (Iranian kings), Faghfoors (Chinese King), Tzar (Russian emperors), Sultan of Hind, the rulers of the South, Raos (South Asian Rajput rulers), all Eastern and Western chiefs and rulers.^{xx} Figuratively, the aforementioned served the sacred command of The Sovereign, in that his wisdom and his dominion is second to none.

Rahit Nama and *Tankhah Nama* – both written in Panjabi – guide the Sikhs in how to live. Listen, Sikh Brother, Nand Lal: "The body of Guru's Sikh becomes auspicious when it is primarily and diligently, engaged in the service of the Perfection."^{xxxi} And how to deal with the dominating forces of the world, liberty or death? "One who becomes subservient to the tyrant and surrenders the sword, dies endlessly."^{xxxii} When a lifestyle lived with an attitude of defiance becomes the norm, "the Khalsa will rule, there will be no non-believers. After utter frustration, all will unite and the ones in Divine refuge will survive."^{xxxiii} This remains the promise of The Sovereign.

Poets will continue to write about the Tenth, as will historians. None will compare to Bhai Nand Lal Goya. To him: "Guru Gobind Singh is capable of all pursuits and is the asylum for the downtrodden."^{xxxiv}

Today is the Illumination Day (*prakash purab*) of The Sovereign: Warrior Poet, Just Spiritualist, Revolutionary Prophet, Divine Human, and Perfect Light. And so I ask the 'Rider of the Blue Steed':

"O Cup-bearer! Grace me a shot to intoxicate my heart,
To see the Divine for addressing all my challenges."^{xxxv}

5 January 2012

Harinder Singh co-founded the Sikh Research Institute and the Panjab Digital Library. He advocates education as a fulcrum for social change. His passion is everything Sikhi and life-inspiring Panjabi. <http://twitter.com/1Force>.

Endnotes

- ⁱ "I too have received Guru's Amrit. I shall consider myself blessed if I too could accept martyrdom along with my brothers and reach Guru Gobind Singh's court ... My child, this is what you wanted to point out. He, too, is Guru's blessing. If he can also serve the Panth, what greater deeds could be beyond this." This was Balbir Kaur's plea to the Jathedar (group leader) at political rally to free Gurudwaras (Sikh place of learning) from corrupt leaders who were British sycophants in early twentieth century.
- ⁱⁱ Zindgi Nama, Bhai Nand Lal 'Goya,' Bhai Nand Lal Granthavli, edited by Ganda Singh, Panjabi University, Patiala, Ghazal 61, couplet 3
- ⁱⁱⁱ Spirit of the Sikh, Puran Singh, Part I, Panjabi University, Patiala, p. 41
- ^{iv} Kalgidhar Camatkar, Bhai Vir Singh, Part I, Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan, New Delhi, p. 251
- ^v Joti Bigas, Bhai Nand Lal 'Goya,' Bhai Nand Lal Granthavli, edited by Ganda Singh, Panjabi University, Patiala, couplets 23-28
- ^{vi} Ganj Nama, Bhai Nand Lal 'Goya,' Bhai Nand Lal Granthavli, edited by Ganda Singh, Panjabi University, Patiala, stanza 74
- ^{vii} abid, stanza 80
- ^{viii} Joti Bigas, couplets 128-29
- ^{ix} abid, couplets 160-61
- ^x Sahije Racio Khalsa, Harinder Singh 'Mehboob,' Singh Brothers, Amritsar, p. 463
- ^{xi} Joti Bigas, couplet 30
- ^{xii} abid, couplet 136
- ^{xiii} Zindgi Nama, couplets 96-97
- ^{xiv} abid, couplets 87-88
- ^{xv} Ganj Nama, couplet 124-25
- ^{xvi} Joti Bigas, couplet 155
- ^{xvii} Ganj Nama, couplet 114
- ^{xviii} For details see Puran Singh's "Critics of the Sikhs", Modern Review, Calcutta, 1916
- ^{xix} Joti Bigas, couplet 115
- ^{xx} abid, couplets 35-42
- ^{xxi} Rahit Nama, Bhai Nand Lal 'Goya,' Bhai Nand Lal Granthavli, edited by Ganda Singh, Panjabi University, Patiala, couplet 33
- ^{xxii} Tankhah Nama, Bhai Nand Lal 'Goya,' Bhai Nand Lal Granthavli, edited by Ganda Singh, Panjabi University, Patiala, couplet 15
- ^{xxiii} abid, couplet 62
- ^{xxiv} Ganj Nama, couplet 136
- ^{xxv} Divan-i-Goya, Bhai Nand Lal 'Goya,' Bhai Nand Lal Granthavli, edited by Ganda Singh, Panjabi University, Patiala, Ghazal 3, couplet 1