

The History and Compilation of the Dasm Granth

(Part 2 - Philosophical Works)

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PART II—PHILOSOPHIC WORKS

GURU Gobind Singh's approach to Sikhism has a marked originality and uniqueness in expression while the works of the other Gurus are extremely subjective in nature and synthetic in composition, sometimes so complex that one verse contains innumerable ideas synthesized around the theme of *nam*.

Guru Gobind Singh's works are objective and analytical with only one idea and one theme in one verse. While the other Gurus wrote with the Guru consciousness of Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, out of utter humility, just addressed himself as poet.

The sole road to God, said Guru Gobind Singh, was through the power and sincerity of love and worship and by the subordination of nature to divine grace.

He preached vehemently against hypocrisy, idolatry and the worship of personal gods. He believed in the philosophy of the light and the religion of love.

jatr tatr disa visa hoe phaileo anurag

To the east and west, where thou seest, He pervades as supreme love.

Guru Gobind Singh admitted that the source whence all truth proceeds was the incarnate word of the divine *logos*. But his emphasis was on pure, virtuous and disciplined living.

Without purity and sincerity of mind no religious life was possible.

At all times Guru Gobind Singh was mystical, eloquent and sublime, evolving in his philosophic works a *gurnat-advait-ism* which so differs from the abstract, metaphysical and dry *advait-ism* of Shankracharya.

JAP SAHIB (MEDITATION ON GOD)

This is the simplest of all Guru Gobind Singh's compositions. The Sikhs sing it every morning and it is also used in the preparation of *amrit* (nectar of baptism). The theme is set in the first verse:

*cakr cehan ar barb jat ar pat nahenjai, rup rang ar rekh bhekh kou kaih na sakat kaih.
acal murat anbhau parkas amitauj kahijai kot indr indran sah sahan ganijai tribhavan
mahip sur nar asur neti neti ban trin kahat. tav sarab nam kathai kavan karam nam
barnat sumat.*

Contour and countenance, caste, class or lineage, He has none. None can describe His form, figure, shape and semblance whatever; Immovable and self-poised is His being, Without fear, a luminous light sublime. The supreme Indra of Indras and King of kings consider Him to be; He is the sovereign of the three worlds. The demons, the mortals and the angelic beings, Nay, even the grass blades in the forests Proclaim Him to be boundless, endless and infinite. O, who can count all Thy names that are Thy glory? Through Thy enlightenment I will recount all Thy attributive names.

From here begins the song of the attributive names, not as a dry description or counting of names but as we read: "Salutation to the Immortal One, Salutation to the Merciful " the whole of our inner being begins to glow with the radiance and vision of His presence. The soul is etherialized into the perfume of devotion. The soul at first gropes for the recovery of some fragment of His vision and then it feels, in the throbs of an ampler joy, the assurance that it is touching the whole essence of the universe and it is one with truth and God.

THE AKAL USTAT

This is one of the best works by Guru Gobind Singh from the literary as well as the philosophic point of view (discussed in detail in *The Sikh Review*, January 1954). Guru Gobind Singh's conception of religion and God is clearly given in it, Guruji vehemently opposed the idea of a chosen people or a blessed nation:

The Arabs of Arabia, The French of France, The Kureshis of Kandhar Meditate on Thee.

In the middle of the Akal Ustat are ten questions: What is the essence of *atman*? What are sin and virtue? What are *karma* and *dharma*? The verses from 211 to 230 fit more properly into some version of Chandi Charitar than in Akal Ustat. They are inconsistent with the development of thought in the Akal Ustat. Verses 20 to 30 form the daily prayer of the Sikhs. In the Akal Ustat the author's kindling vision goes deeper and deeper into the unchanging glory and the unconditioned self-completeness of God.

GYAN PRABODH (PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE)

This is another ambitious work which is incomplete and a major portion of it is unfortunately lost. From a literary point of view it has the same perfection and grandeur of language and style as Akal Ustat. Out of 336 verses 125 form the introduction. At the end of the introduction Guruji gave the plan of the book which was to give the progressive evolution of religion in India in four stages. But first he discussed the four noble ways of life: 1. *raj dharma* (religion through political service); 2. *dan dharma* (religion of charity); 3. *bhog dharma* (religion through the pious life of a householder); 4. *moksa dharma* (religion of salvation). Guruji first gave from the history of ancient India the practice of the religion of charity. The purpose of this great work was to show that the highest religion of man was *nam dharma* (enlightenment through the word incarnate).

THE THIRTY-THREE SWAYYAS

These were composed immediately after the organization of the Khalsa and can be said to be the first *raihat-nama* or the code of ethics of the Khalsa.

jagat jot japai nis basar, eh bina man naik na mania

Inspired with the fire of life, Awake with the perpetual song of His name day and night; Believing no other but the one and only God, Having no faith in the worship of tombs, idols and temple images, Completely lost in His beauty and infinite love, Absolutely discarding the lifeless beliefs in holy baths, alms giving, penances and austerities, Such a child of light, fully enlightened and a perfect figure of love, is the Khalsa.

THE LYRICS

These are short, popular poems which throw great light on Guru Gobind Singh's opinions on *yoga*, *sanyasa* and the religion of love. The most notable songs are two and both of them have a historical significance. After the battle of Chamkaur when he lost all four of his sons and he was without any company, shelter or succour, this optimist sang:

*Far, far better are the love-lit straw beds of the Beloved Than the life of the palaces,
Which, without Thee, O Beloved, are incessantly burning funeral pyres.*

The other song was sung when Pundit Kesho Dutt, a great scholar, asked Guru Gobind Singh why he was almost deliberately giving all charity, gifts, wealth, honour and power to his Sikhs who were mostly low-caste people while he was ignoring the purer and higher castes. The Guru in his usual passionate fervour replied:

judh jite in hi hi kripa se...

All battles against tyranny have I fought with the loving grace of these people. I have been able to spread great gifts only through them. All evil and injury have I escaped Because the love of these people of undying faith was my sole protection. My home and heart are full with the joy and glory which they have given; It is through their efforts and help I have gained great knowledge and acquired wide experience; It is with the help of these common people that I have always defeated my enemies. For them was I born; Through them have I attained glory and greatness; Without them and without their loving support What am I? There are millions of creatures like me on earth.

Here is the champion of the cause of the common people whose humility and intense consciousness of the vitality of the common people was remarkable. No Marxist has ever sung such a song of the people as Guru Gobind Singh wrote 150 years before Marx was born and 60 years before the world ever heard of Rousseau and Voltaire. So strong was his faith in what is now known as democratic ideals that even when military dictatorship was expedient and even necessary he left, to quote Dr. Sinha, "the care of the flock as well as his army not to a single person but to the whole community. He placed his faith in the collective wisdom of the community and not in the devotion of a favourite disciple."

THE CHANDI CHARITARS

Chandi or Durga is a pre-Aryan deity. During the 12th and 13th centuries there was a great conflict between Durga worshippers and the followers of the Krishna cult as is clear from the lives of Chandi Das and Jaidev. Then there was a compromise. The Aryan Hindus also accepted her as a deity. The life of Chandi is in a number of Puranas, particularly Markande Puran, Devi Bhagwat and Padma Puran. There are three versions of Chandi Charitar besides a short version in the Triya Charitar. These versions are translations from three different Puranas:

1. First Chandi Charitar, 233 verses, translated most probably from Padam Puran.
2. Second Chandi Charitar (Hindi), 266 verses, mention is made at the end that it is translated from Markande Puran. It forms part of the Bachiter Natak Granth.
3. Third version Durga-di-var, 55 verses, translated most probably from Devi Bhagwat.

The Chandi Charitars have become more popular than other secular works by Guru Gobind Singh because they are the shortest compositions in the Dasm Granth and are available in all brief selections in complete form. All the other selections are bulky. These are the only writings available in Panjabi and the Panjabi version is written in a very popular form of poetry called the *var*.

There are three grievous misunderstandings about which a great deal of fuss has been made by those who used every false argument trying to prove that Guru Gobind Singh was a worshipper of Durga and he derived all his strength for fighting from her and not from the one unmanifested God as is believed by the Sikhs.

While the motive for creating the misunderstanding is one and the same, the misunderstandings about Guru Gobind Singh's conception of Durga are three:

1. In one place Guru Gobind Singh wrote, "I bow to the *bhagauti*," and *bhagauti*, some say, means Chandi or Durga. So it is implied that Guru Gobind Singh meditated on Durga.

2. At the end of all these three Chandi Charitars is written what we call the *mahatam* or the powers that can be attained by reciting the writings. This implies that the Sikhs should recite the Chandi Charitar to attain those powers.

3. The third misunderstanding is created by distorted histories which were mostly written in the 18th century, about 100 years after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. These histories carry the invented story that in the 1698 A. D., *Samvat* 1755, Guru Gobind Singh actually worshipped Durga with elaborate ceremonies asking for courage and power to fight the enemy.

These three views about Guru Gobind Singh have become so popular that even those who know nothing much about Guru Gobind Singh can talk loudly and emphatically about these things.

1. There are two distinctly different words even in the original Sanskrit Puranas from where the Chandi Charitars have been translated. These are *bhagauti* and *Bhagvati*. Throughout the Markande Puran, Padam Puran, Devi Bhagwat and Vishnu Puran, these two words occur frequently and everywhere *Bhagvati* means Durga and *bhagauti* means sword. Nowhere in these Purans is the word *bhagauti* used to mean Durga. Everywhere, throughout the Puranic literature, *bhagauti* means the sword and nowhere does it mean Durga.[1]

In the whole of Dasm Granth the word *bhagauti* occurs in two lines in the text which are:

(1) *pritham bhagauti simar cai guru nanak lai dhyae*

Remembering the supreme sword first, meditate on Guru Nanak.

(2) *lai bhagauti durg sah vajragan bhari*

Durga caught hold of the bhagauti (sword) which glimmered like a flashing flame.

These are the only two lines in the whole of Dasm Granth in which the word *bhagauti* occurs and by no stretch of the imagination can it *be* interpreted as Durga.

The name of Durga occurs in the Dasam Granth over 120 times and innumerable popular names for Durga are repeatedly used such as Chandi, Chandika, Bhavani, Durga, Mahamai, Devi, Ambaka, Jambhha, Mundardani, *etc.*

Guru Gobind Singh gave many new attributive names to God as the wielder of the sword of *dharma*, and the sword became for him the righteous spirit of God in which was ingrained his deep rooted faith in the ultimate victory of good over evil. Those names are: *Asdhuj* (one who has the sword on His banner), *Asket* (wielder of the sword), *Aspan* (with the sword in hand) and *Kharagpan* (with the sword in hand). Other words which occur signifying God's sword-spirit of *dharma* are *khag*, *tegan*, *sri as*, *kirpan*, *sarbloh* (all-steel), *maha loh* (great steel) and *bhagauti*.

2. The second point of confusion is about some lines occurring at the end of Chandi Charitar giving the fruit of reciting the Chandi song.

These lines are:

a. First Chandi Charitar:

"For whatever purpose a person reads this life of Chandi, it shall definitely be granted to him."

b. Second Chandi Charitar:

"Even if a foolish person reads the life of Chandi, immense wealth will be bestowed on him. If a coward reads it he will be able to fight most bravely; if a yogi reads it he will attain siddhi and if a student reads it he will attain knowledge."

c. Third Panjabi version Durga ki var:

"He who recites Durga's life will not take birth again."

All these are not the opinions of Guru Gobind Singh. They are the opinions of the writers of the original which Guru Gobind Singh faithfully translated. To dissociate himself and his ideal from it, Guru Gobind Singh either added a short introduction or an epilogue to

each of these versions of Chandi. Guru Gobind Singh's opinions, giving his own faith were:

(a) In the First Chandi Charitar he said:

*deh siva bar mohe ehai, shubh carman te kabhu na taro, na daro ar so jab jae laro,
niscari kar aprni jit karo, ar sikh hau apne hi man kau eh lalac hau gun tau ucro, jab av
kd audh nidan banai at hi ran mai tab juh maro*

*Give me this power, O Almighty: From righteous deeds I may never refrain, Fearlessly
may I fight all the battles of life, Full confidence may I ever have In asserting my moral
victories, May my supreme ambition and learning be To sing of Thy glory and victory.
When this mortal life comes to a close May I die with the joy and courage of a martyr.*

(b) The second Chandi Charitar is a part of the Bachiter Natak Granth. The Bachiter Natak has a collective introduction in which Guru Gobind Singh repeatedly wrote that he did not believe in the worship of gods and goddesses. In verses 92 and 93 Guruji said, "It is through Thy power, O God, that Durga destroyed the demons like Sumbh, Nisumbh, Dhumer and Lochan, Chand and Mund. It is through Thy power, O God, that Rama destroyed Ravana." And he concludes, Also "*so sahib pae kaha parvah rahi eh das tiharo—With such a supreme One as my Lord, what care I, Thy servant, for anything or anyone?*"

In the next stanza Guruji commented on the *avatars* and goddesses who were instrumental in killing all these and said,

"Kahe ko kur kare tapasa inki kou kaudi ke kam na aihai—Why indulge ye in the futile worship of these deities? Their worship is not worth a kaudi (one-twentieth of a penny)

(c) The third Panjabi version has a long introduction, a part which forms the national prayer. In it the Guru invoked the grace and blessings of God and the nine Gurus.

*taihi durga saj kai daita da nas karaya, taitho hi bal ram lai nal bana dehsir ghaia,
taitho hi bal krishan lai kans kesi pakad giraya, bade bade muni devte kai jug tini tan
laia, kini tera nht na paya.*

It is Thou who created Durga and had the demons destroyed, From Thee derived Rama all the strength to kill the ten-headed Ravana. From Thee derived Krishna all his strength to catch Kans by the hair and dash him to the ground. Great seers and sages in all ages strained hard in penance to know Thee. None, none has attained Thy end.

In these short prologues and epilogues Guru Gobind Singh made his own opinion about Durga quite clear. He took these figures simply as historical persons of note and nothing else.

3. The third question is, did Guru Gobind Singh actually worship Durga for strength before the creation of the Khalsa in 1698? This story was introduced to some partially unreliable records in order to distort or discredit the great creation of the Khalsa which in its dramatic way of imparting the spiritual powers and responsibility of the Guru to the people was historically unique.

By this time Guru Gobind Singh had fought about eight or nine of his major and minor battles. If he had managed to fight all the severe battles without invoking Chandi so far, where was the necessity of invoking the strength of Chandi for one or two more battles? How was it that Guru Har Gobind fought all his battles without even thinking of Chandi?

Even the places where Guru Gobind Singh rested for a while became sacred to the Sikhs and were worshipped by them. How is it that no Sikh, not even stray individuals, ever pay homage to Durga nor do they ever worship her? In the Zafarnama, which was written only six years later, Guru Gobind Singh called himself an idol breaker.

In 1698 a Muslim reporter of Aurangzeb's who witnessed the creation of the Khalsa quoted the speech of Guru Gobind Singh in his despatch to Aurangzeb as follows:

"Let all embrace one creed and obliterate the differences of religion. Let the four Hindu castes who have different rules of guidance abandon them all, adopt the one form of adoration and become brothers. Let no one deem himself superior to another. Let no one pay heed to the Ganges and other places of pilgrimage which are spoken of with reverence in the Shastras or adore incarnations such as Rama, Krishna, Brahma and

Durga but believe in Guru Nanak and other Gurus. Let men of four castes receive my baptism, eat out of one dish and feel no disgust or contempt for another."

In none of his philosophic compositions did he invoke Durga, nor did he invoke the goddess when writing his letters to Aurangzeb. Everywhere it is the invocation of God as the protector of the good through the sword of *dharmā*.

The Durga worship story is generally placed in history in Baisakh 1755 *Samvat*. We learn from the Dasm Granth that Guru Gobind Singh completed his Ramayan (Life of Lord Rama which forms a part of Bachiter Natak Granth) in Baisakh 1755. The epilogue which he wrote to this Ramayan in this very month in which he is alleged to have worshipped Durga is as follows:

paen gahe jab te tumre, tab te kou atikh tare nahi aneo, ram raJiim puran kuran, anek kahai'n mat ek na rnaneo, simrit sastar bed sabai balm bhed kahain ham ek na janeo sri aspan kiipa tumri kar main na kaheo sab tohe bakhaneo. dohra: sagal duar kau chad kai gaheo tuharo duar bauhe gahe kl laj as gobihd das tuhar.

Ever since I took refuge at Thy feet, O God, I have brought no other god under the eye of my faith. Rain and Rahim are various deities of the Puran and Quran. They describe the One so differently; But I believe in none, I have faith in none but Thee, O God. The Vedas, Shastras and Simritis give various forms of worship; I believe in none and I have faith in none of them. O Glorious Weilder of the sword of dharmā, It is only through Thy grace I have been able to write all this. dohra: After leaving all other doors, O God, I have come to Thy door. O make me Thine for having once called me Thine own. I, Gobind, am just a humble servant of Thine.

These verses express the thoughts and the moods, the faith, the philosophy and the spiritual ideal to which he was inwardly attached in the very month in which he is alleged to have worshipped Durga. By comparing Guru Gobind Singh's translation with the original in Sanskrit written by Rishi Markande I have noticed that Guru Gobind Singh has deliberately excluded those chapters which give the list of *siddhis*, psychic powers,

that can be attained by reciting it. The *siddhis* range from the cure of leprosy, smallpox and snake bite to the power of defeating the enemy.

He translated these lives of Durga in the literary language of those times to reveal Durga in the true light. He was pained to see that millions of Bengalis and Biharis worshipped Durga and yet they were timid and weak. The idea of fighting *dharmayudh*, the battles of righteousness, had disappeared from their consciousness. The worship of Durga had degenerated into a worship of a low type of psychic powers.

[1] Rishi Markande gives over 108 names to Durga in his Markande Puran but *bhagauti* is not among them.