

Guru Gobind Singh – (22 December 1666 –7 October 1708)

Guru Gobind Singh, born Gobind Rai on 22 December 1666, was only nine when he became the tenth Sikh Guru. His father Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs, accepted martyrdom at the hands of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb for the protection of the Hindu religion, setting an unparalleled example of sacrifice.

A spiritual master, warrior, poet, philosopher, and scholar of many languages, Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa, a community of faithful recognized as "Pure" – free from the prejudice of caste, color, social status, or creed. The Khalsa adopted five visible articles of faith known as the Five 'K's which gave Sikhs their unique and distinct identity, enabling them to be recognizable in a crowd and visibly state their commitment to this new way of life and philosophy. Sikhs wear this external uniform, most noticeably the turban, to unify and bind them to the beliefs of the faith and to remind them of their commitment to always work towards the welfare of humanity and stand up against injustice. The turban also signified equal status among the Sikhs since it reclaimed this symbol that was otherwise only worn by the higher classes and elite members of society.

The five 'K's represent five central principles that are to be followed by a member of the Khalsa:

- Kesh or unshorn hair, a symbol of spirituality, covered by a turban, symbolizing equality, dignity, and leadership.
- Kangha or wooden comb, symbolizing cleanliness.
- Kara or iron bracelet, symbolizing unity with God, strength, and integrity.
- Kacchera or knee-length shorts, symbolizing self-restraint.
- Kirpan or ceremonial sword, symbolizing the importance of defending oneself, or those who cannot protect themselves. The Kirpan was never meant as a symbol of aggression, but instead represents one's duty to serve humanity.

Guru Gobind Singh taught that only when all means have been exhausted and negotiations have failed can the sword be yielded in defense of a legitimate and worthy cause.

Sikh men take on the last name "Singh" meaning lion, and women "Kaur" meaning princess, thereby eliminating any reference to caste and highlighting equality.

Guru Gobind Singh also continued the formalization of the Sikh faith founded by Guru Nanak. He wrote important Sikh texts and through his poetry he preached love and equality and the worship of the One Supreme Being. Guru Gobind Singh became the last living Guru after declaring that the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Scriptures, would become the eternal Guru.

The Guru Granth Sahib is the only major religious text which contains writings not only by the Gurus but also from 36 Hindu and Muslim saints, whose teachings were consistent with those of the Sikh Gurus. The Guru Granth Sahib is the ultimate eternal spiritual authority for the Sikhs.

December 22 will mark the 350th anniversary of the birth of this transformative spiritual leader.