

BRAVERY AMONG SIKHS LINKED TO VIOLENCE

It is quite likely some of today's violence among the Sikhs stems from the teachings of the 10th and last Guru.

Sunday, Jan. 18 local Sikhs honored the birthday of Guru Gobind Singh, the last of the 10 Gurus. Gobind Singh was born during a reign of violence and persecution by the Moslem rulers of the day. As reported in my column of Dec. 11 his father Tegn Bahadur the 9th Guru was a man of peace. He is probably best remembered for his famous lecture, "It is better to forgive an enemy than to visit a holy place." Unfortunately for Tegn Bahadur the Moslem ruler Aurengezab had decided the best way to win favor with God was to acquire more converts to the Moslem faith. Tegn Bahadur was beheaded for refusing to convert and for advising his followers to convert only when he did. His young son Gobind was just nine years old at the time of Tegn Bahadur's execution.

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When Bogind became leader of the Sikhs he vowed to create a body of Sikhs so distinguishable none could hide his identity, thereby preventing a repeat of the circumstances surrounding his father's funeral when no one dared come forth to claim his body for fear of being identified and thereby being persecuted by the Moslem Emperor.

As a youth, Bogind studied literature and poetry and learned to write poetry himself. He spent much time translating ancient heroic stories and tried to instill the virtues of heroism and chivalry in his people. Jealous of his growing

influence both Moslems and Hindus used any excuse to provoke trouble with the Sikhs.

As the Sikhs were often divided by caste differences and superstitions, the Guru decided to build an army who would fight against all the taboos of caste, dress, diet and status; who would believe in one supreme being and who would look upon all humanity as one.

He began the religious rite of Baptism by water stirred with a sword. He called upon his followers to keep ever ready to defend the faith and to act as a unify-

ing force in the world. Bravery as much as peace and purity was to be their religion.

Finally this last Guru proclaimed a code of discipline. The members of the new brotherhood, which was called the Khalsa [the pure ones] were instructed to wear five symbols called the 5 k's namely Keshas [uncut hair]; Khanga [the comb to keep it clean]; Kara [the steel bangle, symbol of the omnipresence of God; Kacha [short drawers, the symbol of chastity; and the Kirdan or sword [a symbol of resistance to evil]. Initiated men took the name Singh [lion] and women who were admitted to the Khalsa were given the name Kaur [princess].

Meekness and humility were now laid aside. Personal courage became the highest of all virtues and cowardice the basest of all crimes the pacifists of one time became reckless warriors. The Rajas of neighboring states saw in the activities of the Guru a danger to their own religion and power and

they combined to turn him out.

Many years of battling and other struggles followed resulting in the deaths of all four of Golbinds sons. Cobind Singh himself was assassinated but before his death he had all his poetry added to that of the previous Gurus and compiled into the Sikhs Holy Book, the Granth Sahib. He also decreed that there be no other living Guru after him and that followers of the Sikh faith should revere the Granth Sahib as a living teacher.

Three hundred years later the Sikhs are still quarelling and fighting for what they believe is a religious cause, claiming that the Hindu majority in India is persecuting the minority Sikhs.

Less than 10 years ago a leader emerged who advocated the use of violence and force and although he was killed while resisting arrest by government troops, many Sikhs see him as a saint or martyr and his picture hangs in the homes and temples of those who favor his methods.