

Books

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Gurū Arjan's Martydom

*Note to teacher: This is for teacher reference and not to be read to the children directly.*

As was to be expected, the natural loss of Gurūship also came as a great shock to the over-ambitious Prithī Cand (ਪ੍ਰਿਥੀ ਚੰਦ). He now began to make all sorts of machinations to see Gurū Arjan ousted. Gurū Arjan did his best to placate him and assigned him to all the income that was to accrue from property. For the maintenance of the community-kitchen and other institutions of the Sikh Nation, he depended on voluntary offering of the Sikhs. Prithī's machinations and his exploiting of some segments of the Sikh community led to trying times for Gurū Arjan and his Nation. The flow of income into the Sikh Nation dwindled and Sikh institutions, including the laṅgar (ਲੰਗਰ), suffered. Even musicians of the Gurū, such as Sattā and Balvanḍ (ਸਤਾ-ਬਲਵੰਡ), parted company with Gurū Arjan. Gurū Arjan, however, remained detached and imperturbable in his omniscient harmony with the Divine will. Bhāī Gurdās (ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ), a maternal uncle of Gurū Arjan and an ardent Sikh preacher on assignment at Agra, came to know of the state of affairs at Cak Rāmdās (ਚਕ ਰਾਮਦਾਸ). He came back and with the help of devoted Bābā Buḍḍhā (ਬਾਬਾ ਬੁਢਾ), showed Prithī Cand his proper place and checked the pilferage of the much needed revenue for construction works that were going on at that time. The Gurū asked the Sikhs to contribute one-tenth of their income, to the Gurū's exchequer.

After initial animosity and acts of meanest treachery, for which Prithī Cand, the elder brother of Gurū Arjan, earned the sobriquet Mīṇā (ਮੀਣਾ / the detestable) from Bhāī Gurdās, he had reconciled a bit with his lot in the hope that after Gurū Arjan's dying issueless, the Gurūship would automatically pass on to his son, Meharbān (ਮੇਹਰਬਾਨ). But this was not to be. The birth of a child to Gurū Arjan upset his plan. He again became at loggerheads with the Gurū. Many a hymn left by Gurū Arjan and recorded in the Gurū Granth Sāhib, reveal attempts made by him on the life of the little child and his providential escape every time. Prithī Cand, in collusion with Akbar's (ਅਕਬਰ) Hindu courtier Bīrbal (ਬੀਰਬਲ), imposed a visitor's tax on the residents of Amritsar. On Gurū's advice, these lower-caste individuals refused to pay the tax, upon which Bīrbal – a representative of Brahminism – was furious. He decided

to raze Amritsar to ground, but before he could proceed towards Amritsar, he got an order from Jāhāngīr (ਜਹਾਂਗੀਰ) to fight the Yusufzais (ਯੂਸਫ਼ਾਜੀ) . Bīrbal was killed in the battle. Prithī Cand then instigated the Muslim Governor of Jalandhar, Sulhī Khām (ਸੁਲਹੀ ਖਾਂ), and incited him to attack and harass the Gurū, but Sulhī Khām met an ignominious death by a fall in a live kiln on his way to Cak Rāmdās (ਚਕ ਰਾਮਦਾਸ) or Rāmdāspur. Prithī Cand felt very discomfited and was always in search of fresh excuses to vilify and harm Gurū Arjan. Gurū Arjan thanked the Divine.

Gurū Arjan invited martyrdom because his sovereign ways threatened the religious, political and social establishment of the time. The key players representing the establishment included the arrogant Brahminical order represented by Candū Shāh (ਚੰਦੂ ਸ਼ਾਹ), an intolerant Sufī (ਸੂਫੀ) sect represented by Shekh Ahmad Sarhindī (ਸ਼ੇਖ ਅਹਮਦ ਸਰਹਿੰਦੀ) and an illegitimate government represented by Jāhāngīr, who had usurped the throne.

There is a strong attempt to deprecate Sikh memory, and this article presents not just an overview of the martyrdom of Gurū Arjan, but also an exercise to understand how Sikh history is being distorted.

Sikh historical accounts put the blame of Gurū Arjan's martyrdom largely on Candū Shāh, who was one of Jāhāngīr's finance officials. The reasons for Candū's stand against the Sikh Gurū were two:

- Gurū Arjan refused to marry his son, Hargobind, to Candū's daughter upon the counsel of the saṅgat (ਸੰਗਤ) of Delhi. Candū interpreted this refusal as deliberate humiliation and stirred feelings of animosity within Candū. Such virulent reactions to perceived wounded pride prevail in Pañjāb even today.
- As an upper-caste Hindu and as a representative of Brahminism, Candū took exception to Gurū Arjan's growing influence that sought to create an egalitarian society at the expense of the stratified caste-structure that gave special status to men like Candū. He allied with Gurū Arjan's brother, Prithī Cand – another detractor of the Sikh movement – to orchestrate the martyrdom of Gurū Arjan by filing a formal complaint in the Mughal court.

Mohsin Fānī (ਮੋਹਸਿਨ ਫ਼ਾਨੀ), the author of *Dabistā-e-Mazhaib* (ਦਬਿਸਤਾਨ-ਏ-ਮਜ਼ਹਬ), a contemporary account in Persian, says that a heavy fine of Rupees 100,000 was imposed against the Gurū who refused to pay it. The Sikh oral history is unambiguous about Candū's role in carrying out tortures against Gurū Arjan after convincing Jāhāngīr. The Gurū was made to sit on a hot iron plate, hot sand was thrown over his body and he was boiled in a cauldron. He was, therefore, deprived of food and water and put into hot blazing sand and stoned, which caused blood to ooze out of his head. He was tortured for three to five days. The Gurū remained in blissful state, accepting this as Vāhgurū "sweet Will." With wounds blistering on his body, on 30 May 1606, tied hand and feet, he was thrown into river Rāwī (ਰਾਵੀ).

Jāhāṅgīr alone should not be held responsible for the Gurū's martyrdom. He did play some role. Candū and other elements hostile to the Panth, however, instigated him to his decision. The fact remains that Sikhī was a threat to both, the practitioners of Brahminism – an ideology the Sikh Gurūs condemned, and to the Mughal state that was increasingly becoming intolerant of non-Semitic faiths. It may be stated that Jāhāṅgīr was not religious and had even considered converting to Christianity at one time, so the threat came from others instigating him. Later, under the influence of Hazrat Miām Mīr (ਹਜ਼ਰਤ ਮੀਆਂ ਮੀਰ), Jāhāṅgīr even tried to correct his mistaken ways. Eventually, he became friends with Gurū Hargobind, the Sixth Nānak.

Candū's role in Gurū Arjan's martyrdom is a certainty when one looks at his own execution at the hands of the Sikhs after Jāhāṅgīr handed him over to Gurū Hargobind. "According to the Sikh traditional accounts, Candū was handed over to the Gurū [Hargobind] for torturing Gurū Arjan and met a sad end at the hands of Sikh *sangat*." Gurū Hargobind would have never allowed this to happen if Candū were not responsible.