



Bandi Chhorh Diwas (ਬੰਦੀ ਛੋੜ ਦਿਵਸ) Day Of Freedom

Sikhs celebrate “Bandi Chhorh Diwas” on the same day as “Diwali” is celebrated by the Hindus in October-November. “Bandi Chhorh Diwas” means “Day Of Freedom” and “Diwali” means “Festival Of Lights” and it is also known as “Deepawali” meaning row of lights or Deevas (i.e. clay pot filled with oil to keep the submerged cotton wick alight).



Sikh Significance

It was on this day in 1619 AD that the 6th Guru Guru Hargobind Sahib was released from the Gwalior Fort (India) by the Mogul Emperor, Jahangir. Guru Sahib refused to leave the fort on his own and demanded release of other 52 Hindu kings. His demand was accepted and 52 kings were set free from the life imprisonment. Guru Sahib was accompanied by Baba Buddha Ji, Bhai Gurdas Ji and the Sikh Sangat on his journey from Gwalior back to Amritsar. Upon return, grand celebrations were held. Harmandir Sahib was illuminated & fireworks were displayed. Gurbani kirtan & prayers were performed.

Even today, the Sikhs remember Guru Hargobind Sahib as “Bandi Chhorh Guru” (freedom provider from the captivity of worldly bonds) by visiting the Gurdwara and join the Sadh-sangat and listen to the Gurbani & Kirtan. The fireworks are displayed; candles & deevas are lit on the day. The greetings and sweets are exchanged. Prayers are performed for shattering the materialist bond in order to merge back into the supreme Waheguru (objective of human life).

Background Of Bandi Chhorh Diwas

Guru Arjan Dev Sahib's Martyrdom

Guru Arjan Dev Sahib, the 5th Sikh Guru in succession compiled the Adi Granth in 1605 AD, who presently is the “Shabad (word) Guru” of the Sikhs. The Sikh beliefs were adopted by many from various religions as these were simple and without arduous/complex religious rituals. The Muslim and Hindu religious leaders could not tolerate the popularity of the upcoming Sikh religion. The Mogul emperor Jahangir was in power then, who was convinced by these so-called religious authorities that Islam was under threat. The circumstances led to Guru Arjan Dev Sahib's arrest. Chandu, one of Jahangir's officers, prepared a horrific plan to torture Guru Sahib to death. The reason for Chandu's jealousy was that his pride was hurt when Guru Sahib turned down the marriage proposal for his daughter to Guru Sahib's son Shri Hargobind Sahib due to Chandu's egoistic attitude.

Guru Hargobind Sahib Became 6th Guru

Guru Hargobind Sahib at the time of his father's martyrdom was only 11 year old. He resumed the Guruship as the 6th Guru. It is worthwhile mentioning that the first five Gurus did not involve in fighting any battles but Guru Hargobind Sahib was trained by his father to defend against brutality and injustice. Special military training was given to young Guru Hargobind Sahib under the direction of Baba Buddha Sahib. Later on, Guru Hargobind Sahib gathered the Sikhs and provided military training at “Akali Takhat” (Throne Of Waheguru), which was built facing the Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar. Harmandir Sahib symbolised spiritual power for Sikhs and Akali Takhat for the temporal power. Guru Sahib wore two swords called Miri (dealing with worldly affairs; referring to sovereignty) and Piri (representing spirituality). This was amazing about Guru



Sahib who took a big responsibility on his young shoulders. He was a spiritual as well as a great leader i.e. **a true Saint & Soldier**.

Kind, Courageous And Forgiving Guru

Guru Hargobind Sahib's plans worried Jahangir in that He might retaliate for his father's assassination. He invited Guru Sahib to Delhi and after a long dialogue, he was convinced that Guru Sahib had no such intention and was totally satisfied with Guru Sahib's beliefs and principles. Jahangir became friendly with Guru Sahib but with some sense of caution. Main reason for this friendship was to keep a close eye on Guru Sahib's moves.

Once, Guru Sahib was accompanying Jahangir, then, a tiger attacked Jahangir. He fired all his shots/arrows but missed the attacking tiger. His accompanying officers failed to respond to his distress call. Brave Guru Sahib got off his horse and put the tiger to rest with his sword. This incident made Jahangir feel obliged to Guru Sahib for having saved his life and he began to repent for the sin he had committed by ordering assassination of Guru Arjan Dev Sahib. He visited Guru Sahib's mother Mata Ganga Ji and apologised for the cruelty.

Guru Sahib Imprisoned

Chandu, who planned the brutal assassination of Guru Arjan Dev Sahib's in his own house at Lahore (now in Pakistan), was quite concerned about the fact that Jahangir was getting very friendly with Guru Sahib and felt that one day he might be taken to task for his evil deeds. He started to play Jahangir against Guru Hargobind Sahib by mentioning about Guru Sahib's strong army, popularity and re-iterating that He might avenge his father's assassination any day. He also engaged an astrologer to contrive Guru Sahib's confinement. Chandu's tricks began to work. Finally, Jahangir ordered Guru Sahib to be detained in the Gwalior fort on a pretext that forthcoming calamity (bad time as predicted by astrologer) for Jahangir could be averted. Guru Sahib had to do another favour to Jahangir by keeping himself imprisoned.

Prison Turn into a Place of Worship

Guru Sahib accepted the decision without hesitation. The next morning, accompanied only by few Sikhs, He set out for Gwalior.

In the fort, several rajas (kings) were detained who had been stripped off their kingdoms by Jahangir and were being ill-treated. They were neither provided sufficient food nor clean clothes to wear. Guru Sahib felt very sympathetic. He shared his rations among the needy prisoners. He brought solace to them by telling them about the reality of life. He engaged them in "Naam-Simran" (devotional Divine meditation). The kings felt as if they had achieved motive of their lives & became Guru's Sikhs (disciples).

Meanwhile, Guru Sahib's mother became anxious when Guru Sahib did not return in due time. She sent Baba Buddha Ji with group of Sikhs to bring him home. Every day, group of Sikhs led by Baba Buddha Ji would go around the fort eager to have sight of their Guru and protest for Guru Sahib's release.

Guru Sahib's Release

Jahangir was surprised by Guru Sahib's popularity in the prison and also constant gathering of Sikhs outside the fort. Group of Sikhs campaigned in Delhi as well to secure Guru Sahib's release. Troubled with fearful visions and the obligation he owed to the Guru, the Emperor gave orders for Guru Sahib's release. There was sadness amongst the 52 kings. They begged Guru Sahib for their well being. The kind Guru was moved and He refused to leave the prison until these Kings were also set free. Jahangir agreed on the condition that only those holding on to



Guru Sahib's dress could leave. Guru Sahib knew this clever plan, as the doorway out of the castle was just wide enough for only one person to pass through. Therefore, Guru Sahib ordered a special robe with 52 tassels of different lengths to enable all the 52 kings walk out of the fort in a single file. The generous Guru and 52 kings were received by Baba Buddha Ji, Bhai Gurdas Ji, Muslim saint Mian Mir & the Sikh Sangat outside the fort.

In Amritsar, the climate was cheerful and joyous. Even other non-sikh people, who were celebrating Diwali at the time, also joined the celebrations. Harmandir Sahib was illuminated and on Guru Sahib's arrival Gurbani was recited and thanksgiving prayer for safe return was performed.



Lessons From The Bandi Chhorh Diwas

- 1) **Give up Forgiveness & Ego** : Guru Hargobind Sahib forgave Jahangir for the sinful act of assassination of his father, Guru Arjan Dev Sahib. Great Guru Sahib saved Jahangir's life rather than letting the tiger eat him alive, as Jahangir was apologetic for his shameful act. One of the lessons we learn from the incident is to forgive those who are willing to correct themselves. Although, it is not an easy thing to do. Remember, what makes a person good or bad is one's thoughts/ attitude, from where the actions originate. If one is willing to correct the attitude then giving a chance to improve is a virtuous act, as stated by Guru Nanak Dev Sahib in the following verse (Guru Granth Sahib Sahib, Page 223).

ਗਉੜੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੧ ॥ ਖਿਮਾ ਗਹੀ ਬ੍ਰਤੁ ਸੀਲ ਸੰਤੋਖੰ ॥ ਰੋਗੁ ਨ ਬਿਆਪੈ ਨਾ ਜਮ ਦੇਖੰ ॥

which means that to practice **forgiveness** is the true fast, good conduct that makes one content. By practising forgiveness, disease (ego) gets eradicated and the pain of death ends (become immortal).

Therefore, all those in superior / better positions should be tolerant about others not so fortunate and do not let their ego become their own enemy. We should not humiliate or isolate anyone from any religion rather should pray for them to attain understanding and ability to follow Guru's advice and be good Sikhs/human beings. It applies to Amritdhari Sikhs who should exercise tolerance for all and should not judge others based on whether one has taken with Amrit yet or not, rather pray for them to join the Khalsa Panth. Gurbani advises us to keep away from ego :

ਕੋਟਿ ਕਰਮ ਕਰੈ ਹਉ ਧਾਰੇ ॥ ਸ੍ਰਮੁ ਪਾਵੈ ਸਗਲੇ ਬਿਰਥਾਰੇ ॥ ਅਨਿਕ ਤਪਸਿਆ ਕਰੇ ਅਹੰਕਾਰ ॥
ਨਰਕ ਸੁਰਗ ਫਿਰਿ ਫਿਰਿ ਅਵਤਾਰ ॥ ਅਨਿਕ ਜਤਨ ਕਰਿ ਆਤਮ ਨਹੀ ਦ੍ਰਵੈ ॥ ਹਰਿ ਦਰਗਹ ਕਹੁ ਕੈਸੇ ਗਵੈ ॥
ਆਪਸ ਕਉ ਜੋ ਭਲਾ ਕਹਾਵੈ ॥ ਤਿਸਹਿ ਭਲਾਈ ਨਿਕਟਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ॥ ਸਰਬ ਕੀ ਰੇਨ ਜਾ ਕਾ ਮਨੁ ਹੋਇ ॥
ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਤਾ ਕੀ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਸੋਇ ॥ (ਪੰਨਾ ੨੭੮, ਗਉੜੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫).

Which means "If someone does millions of good deeds, while acting in ego; all this effort goes in vain. If someone performs great penance, while acting in pride, one shall be reincarnated into heaven and hell, over and over again. One who makes all sorts of efforts, but the soul is still not softened (no kindness) - how can one go to Shri's Court? One who calls oneself good — goodness shall not draw near. One whose mind is the dust of all (kind & humble) — says Nanak, his/her reputation is spotlessly pure" (Guru Granth Sahib p278)



- 2) **Be Kind** : If we look back in the history, all the military commanders & leaders lacked compassion which resulted in suffering to the innocents (e.g. Hitler, Sadam Hussain etc). Guru Hargobind Sahib's leadership was unmatched which was combined with kindness, compassion & tolerance. Guru Sahib saved Jahangir's life by putting his own life at risk and also could not bear the thought of leaving the 52 kings behind in Gwalior fort. Absence of kindness in the human beings has caused unbalance of wealth, prosperity & standards, which has led to terrible distress in the world.
- 3) **Be true Saint & Soldier** : First & foremost duty of all human beings is to be a "saint" (Naam Japna; to be devotional to Almighty Waheguru) and secondly to protect the faith and the needy in the role of a "soldier".

Therefore, it is vital that one performs meditation for at least for 10% of the time in a day (2hour & 24 minutes). In today's democratic world, it is vital that everyone is educated to a good standard in order to practice honest living and have confidence to deal with injustice and any kind of discrimination. It is very important for one to be physically fit by doing regular exercises. Not only the physical exercises help in maintaining the physical fitness, but also help to reduce the stress levels.

How to Celebrate Bandi Chhorh Diwas / Diwali

- Visit Gurdwara to join the Sadh-Sangat and pray to the Guru for Naam Dan (spiritual bliss) and for forgiveness for the sins and liberation from the worldly bonds (ego, lust, anger, greed, jealousy, hatred and peer pressure etc.)
- **Participate in the lighting of the deevas & fireworks sensibly.** There have been incidents of fire due to over enthusiasm in lighting the deeva or candle resulting in serious damage to the Gurdwara buildings. This defeats the purpose of celebration. What kind of celebration it is. Think carefully, if a friend of yours or even your own child soils a part of your house, it will not leave you in a happy mood.

Gurbani advises us which deeva to light and where in the following shabad ;

ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ ੧ ॥ ਦੀਵਾ ਮੇਰਾ ਏਕੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਦੁਖੁ ਵਿਚਿ ਪਾਇਆ ਤੇਲੁ ॥ ਉਨਿ ਚਾਨਣਿ ਓਹੁ ਸੋਖਿਆ ਚੁਕਾ ਜਮ ਸਿਉ ਮੇਲੁ ॥

which means that God's Name (divine devotion) is my lamp (to be lighted in the mind); I have put the oil of suffering (ego) into it. Its flame has dried up this oil, and I have escaped meeting with the Messenger of Death i.e. attained union with Waheguru. (Guru Granth Sahib, Page 358)

Therefore, lighting a deeva in true sense is acquiring Divine knowledge that leads one to become devotional to Shri Waheguru, humble, kind & forgiving.

May our prayers be listened and Waheguru grant us freedom like the 52 kings.

ਆਪਿ ਮੁਕਤੁ ਮੁਕਤੁ ਕਰੈ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਤਿਸੁ ਜਨ ਕਉ ਸਦਾ ਨਮਸਕਾਰੁ.

meaning that He (Guru) who Himself is liberated, liberates the universe (i.e. "**Bandi Chhorh**"). Nanak says, I bow (to the Guru) in reverence forever (Guru Granth Sahib, Page 295).

Dhan Dhan Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib