

Deh Siva bar mohe ehai & dhol mridang bajai

Gurtej Singh

This is a piece of poetry popularly recited among the Sikhs. Many have it on their letterheads. Several organisations like the Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle, have adopted it as their ‘national anthem.’ If you attend a Sikh gathering, it is very likely to start with a rendering of this verse. In wartime it has been used by the Media to enthuse people as was done during the two wars with Pakistan. This is a verse of adoration by a devotee to a deity. In it he asks the worshipped: ‘grant me a boon never to waver from the righteous deeds. I should have no fear when I clash with the enemy. I should, by my faith, ensure my victory. I should be tempted to utter your attributes as a lesson to myself. When the end of my life span approaches, I should die fighting on the field of battle.’ These sentiments accord very well with Sikh war ethics and appeal to every chivalrous person. To read it as a piece of inspired poetry essentially by a poet about whom nothing much but the name is known, would hurt no one. To treat it as a sacred verse and to use it as a prayer with all the attendant reverence is however, a ridiculous perversion. To hold that it was the Guru who wrote it, comes within the definition of blasphemy.

Those who know the origin of this verse and the circumstances in which it occurs in that composition have objected to its reverent use. The objectors know that Siva is the name of the Hindu goddess who goes by many names one of which is Siva. Those enthusiastic about it hold the verse to have been composed by the Tenth Guru and *believe* that it is addressed to Akal Purakh or the God of *gurbani*. This matter can easily be resolved by referring to the original composition. No one bothers to read it except those who propose to perpetuate the error due to various extraneous reasons, including the political. They know it full well that it refers unmistakably to goddess Durga but prefer to propagate a blatant falsehood.

This four line verse, in the *swayia* form occurs in one of the four compositions devoted to the exploits of *devi* Durga or Chandi. All the four compositions form a part of the so-called *dasamgranth* authorship of which is wrongly attributed to Guru Gobind Singh by a section of the not too well informed Sikhs. These four compositions form the more significant part of that book. The one occurring first of all bears the title *Chandi Charitar Ukat Bilas* (pp. 192-259), the second has been recently christened *Cahndi Charitar-2* (pp. 260-313), the third one is in Punjabi and is called *Vaar Drga ki* (pp. 314-335) and the fourth is in Braj like the other two and forms Charitar number 404 (pp. 606-675). In a recension inspired (read ‘financed’) by Virsa Singh of Gobind Sadan Delhi and Shiv Sadan Garhganga (which has been used here), these compositions occupy a significant part. The first three are a part of one of the books called *Bachittarnatak* comprising the *dasamgranth*. This is about the past and future incarnations of Vishnu, a god of the Hindu trinity. The last one is a part of another book in the same volume. It is a part of the four hundred and four tales (not the exact number) which go to compose the book *Charitropakhyan* or the ribald tales, primarily of ‘deceitful women.’

All these four compositions are in adoration of the goddess variously named, Durga, Chandi, Bhawani, Bhagauti, Kali, Mahakali and so on. She is supposed to have come to the aid of the gods when they were defeated by demons. She restores them to their heaven after doing some hard fighting. The original story is a part of the *Markanday Purana*, one of the Hindu scriptures. All these are supposed to be loose translations of the same original. They vary with the original in some details but conform to the basic story told in that *Puran*.

The goddess has been described as the Shakti of god Shiva in Hindu mythology. Dowson affirms, it “is the especial energy concerned with sexual intercourse and magical powers – (p. 317).” Most of the four hundred and four tales celebrate sexual exploits of the depraved, women, drugged nymphomaniacs and heavily intoxicated perverted men. Since the “female principle is worshipped, not only symbolically, but in the actual woman, and a promiscuous intercourse forms a part of the orgies,” (p. 318) this thrice told tale of the goddess is also included in the *Charitropakhyan*, though nothing obscene is attributed to her. It is because of her ritualistically pre-eminent position in the religious rites of the worshippers of Shakti (Shakats), that the fourth tale has been included in this collection.

Even a casual reader can discern on a cursory reading that the object of adoration of all these four tales is the same goddess Durga and that Siva is another one of her names.

The *swayia* in question appears at the end of the *Chandi Charitar Ukat Bilas* (p. 258). It is numbered 231 while the book ends at couplet number 233. As was customary with medieval poets, it ends with a

prayer to the subject of adoration. In this composition numbered 231, the name used for the goddess is Siva. In the couplet 233, the author makes it amply clear that he is referring to 'mother Chandi' in 231. He says, 'I have composed (more correctly, transliterated) the book of the Satsai (a poem of the 700 verses concerning Durga). There is no book like it. The purpose for which the poet has composed it, grant it (the boon) to me 'Mother Chandika.'

In the same Ukat Bilas, the same goddess has at least twice been referred to as Siva. In the couplet numbered 19 (at p. 198), he mentions that those gods who were terrified and ran away from battle with demons, proceeded expectantly towards the mountain Kailash, while 'contemplating on Siva.' They waited for her for some days and approached her when she came out to take bath.

The couplet 28 (p. 226), describes the commencement of the battle with the demon Rakatbeej. The goddess descended from her abode on the mountain and 'on hearing the commotion Siva made preparations for battle.'

To anyone but the voluntarily blind, it is clear as the sun at noon that the *swayia* under consideration is written by a person who is a worshipper of Durga, to whom the entire *Chandi Charitar Ukat Bilas*, like the three other compositions, is dedicated. His act cringing before the goddess for favours and boons shows that he is a follower of the Shakat denomination of the Hindu religion. It is also clear that the name Siva in the composition refers to the goddess Durga and to none else. As certainly as 'book' does not connote a 'table,' Siva does not connote Akal Purakh.

II

Every reasonable person is shocked that the matter of the *dasamgranth* has often been the focal point of bitter controversy within the *panth* since 1877. The matter is basically academic and is amenable to a solution. All it requires is rational approach, an open discussion and the application of a variation of the guillotine method of disposal often used by legislatures all over the world. With this in mind, a group of persons requested Justice Kuldeep Singh and General Narinder Singh, the two officials of the World Sikh Council to have the issue discussed. The strategy suggested was that a team of about ten people representing a particular point of view be invited for discussion across the table. Some neutral judges, appointed by the WSC could consider the evidence presented. Since Justice Kuldeep Singh had been a judge of the Supreme Court of India, he could be expected to weigh the evidence thoroughly and give his opinion about what appeared to be probable. Further discussion could take place in the community through the Media. It could be in the light of the main discussion at the table and the considered opinion of the judges. After all, everyone knows that the most disputed parts of it are nothing other than the translations of a translation of mythical works and fictitious tales.

Dr. Harnam Singh Shan came to assert that the entire *dasamgranth* was written by Guru Gobind Singh. On *charitropakhayan*, our contentions were that this book is a self contained unit and that it has been composed by authors whose names are mentioned in the text. Its subject matter is entirely different from the rest of the volume. According to a letter written by the Dharam Parchar Committee of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) with the concurrence of the Five Singhs to Santokh Singh, the book has been held to be written by someone other than the Guru. We also presented the other usual arguments.

One argument presented by our very learned Dr. Harnam Singh Shan, believe it or not, was, "*dhol mridang bajai sabh hi ghar – jori jeeai jug char tihari* was sung at my marriage. How can I say it is not composed by the Guru?" Dr. Shan was quite right in a manner of speaking. How else do you support illogical tales of nymphomaniacs, fallen women and depraved men, born in the sick minds of perverted Sakat poets? At several marriages we had heard it sung. We were told that several of our *ragis* start the recitation with the announcement that they are singing a verse that was sung at the marriage of the Tenth Guru himself. A part of the perversion that characterises the poets who composed them, appears to have become a part of the being of ignorant ballad singers. This assertion would mean that the *pakhyan charitars* were in existence when the Guru was just a lad of tender age. It also suffices to bring out the depth of the ignorance prevailing amongst us.

This verse is a part of the notorious tale numbered 108, composed by the poet named Shyam. This tale or *chariter* is a part of a version of the Sassi-Punnu retold there. Briefly the story is that a goddess who had

illicit relations with someone and bore him a female child. She set the newly born baby afloat in the river and returned to heaven. (The reader may have his own opinion on what kind of a goddess she was and what kind of heaven it is where such goddesses are welcome). The child was brought up by a king as his own daughter. He married her off to Punnu. She had good time with him until Punnu's other wife had Punnu killed while out hunting. Sassi came to Punnu's grave and joined him in it. The lewd suggestions, usual to such tales, are an integral part of this one too.

It is at the time of Sassi's marriage with Punnu that this four line *swayia* is supposed to have been sung. Matters are grave enough without the subsidiary tale invented by our *ragis*. To complicate it further, they sing it in the style of a congratulatory verse thus inviting relatives of both the sides to generously donate money as it is customary to donate to a menial worker who offers congratulations on an occasion. Thus they draw extra attention to it by singing it with fervour born of contemplation on high reward.

And now, another great hindrance to discovering the truth has been added. The song stands sanctified by having been sung at Dr. Shan's marriage. This is how the legend grows and grows until it comes to have a life of its own. What future historian will ignore the fact that it was sung at Dr. Shan's marriage? Who will dispute that it is therefore a conclusive proof of Guru's authorship?

To the credit of the Justice Kuldip Singh and the WSC, it must be said that they refused to buy the argument.

III

Major Kirpal Singh represented the Gobind Sadan, Delhi at that meeting. One of his arguments is being repeated here just to demonstrate the ridiculous length to which our prejudices take us. He said, "so and so, one of the original Panj Piaras, had a dream in which Guru Gobind Singh appeared. The Guru categorically told him in that dream that he had composed the entire *dasamgranth*." (He was not referring to Desa Singh for sure). We asked the WSC judges whether they considered that evidence valid? They advise us to give our opinion about it. We consulted among ourselves to forge a matching argument. It was then we realised that a miracle of sorts had happened the previous night. We found, that by a strange coincidence, the Guru had appeared to each one of us that night in a dream. He had categorically denied writing bulk of the *dasamgranth* and had instructed us all not to give in to the Major's thesis. This came as a great relief in the predicament in which we were then placed. It was not an earth shaking victory that we won that day but it certainly could have given a jolt to a small country like, say, Sri Lanka.

Perhaps the authorship of most of the *dasamgranth* is an issue still amenable to resolution by rational discussion if we can resist the temptation to go to the extent of 'being terminologically inexact' in our enthusiasm to promote our own favourite points of view. Such in-exactitude is met with another one of its kind and the rolling stone keeps on gathering dirt to no one's avail.

(Code: deh siva bar; *dasamgranth*, December 30, 2006)