

Mangarh Massacre and Govind Guru

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Abstract

This paper explores the life and legacy of Govind Guru, a spiritual leader and social reformer who played a pivotal role in uplifting the Bhil tribal community in India. The paper delves into Govind Guru's early life, his social reform activities through the Bhagat Panth movement and the Samp Sabha, and his leadership in the fight against British oppression. It culminates in the tragic Mangarh massacre, where hundreds of Bhils were martyred, and Govind Guru's subsequent imprisonment. The paper highlights Govind Guru's unwavering dedication to social justice and his enduring influence on the Adivasi-Bhil community.

Keywords : Govind Guru, Bhil tribe, Mangarh massacre, Bhagat Panth movement, Samp Sabha, Social reform, Indian independence movement, Adivasi

Preface

The history of India's independence movement is one of immense pride. In the lifestyle of India's indigenous people, traditions, culture, and their contributions hold great significance. Throughout the world's civilizations and cultures, the civilization and culture of indigenous communities continue to be a subject of interest for researchers even today. In India's entire struggle for independence, the contribution of tribal brothers is unique. The history of their leader, Shri Govind Guru, is so remarkable that other independence movements and sacrifices may pale in comparison. In 1913, amidst the exploitation, oppression, superstitions, and injustices faced by the Bhil community, Shri Govind Guru, through spirituality, awakened a strong desire for self-respect, independence, and equal rights, along with the opportunities for modern societal development.

Life – Introduction

Shri Govind Guru was born on December 20, 1858, in the Bansiya (Bedsar) village of the Dungarpur district, into a Vanjara family. His father's name was Becharji and his mother's name was Manki (Kushaliben). The atmosphere in his family was deeply spiritual. As the Vanjara community was traditionally nomadic due to their business, they frequently moved from one place to another, which hindered Govind Guru's formal education. Having been raised in a spiritual environment since childhood, Govind Guru, at a very young age, used to listen to the *Ramcharitmanas* stories from the temple priest and the couplets of Kabir Saheb. Additionally, he imbibed spiritual teachings by listening to various discourses and integrated these lessons into his life. As he grew older, his spiritual knowledge deepened. He would gather Bhil children and impart his wisdom to them. His sweet voice and spiritual talks attracted the children, who listened attentively. However, the parents of the Bhil children worried that their children would get too involved in religious activities and neglect their primary work of tending to sheep and goats. In response, Govind Guru reassured them, saying that he would visit during their children's free time to play and engage in *satsang* (spiritual discourse). His positive attitude gradually earned him a good reputation among the Bhils, and he continued to spread his knowledge. Slowly, Govind Guru began to build a

strong rapport with the Bhil community. He personally witnessed the oppression faced by the Bhils at the hands of kings, rulers, and the upper classes. However, his father was concerned that his son might renounce the world and become a monk, so at the age of 20, Govind Guru was married off. Fortunately, his wife, Dhaniben, was also very religious and spiritually inclined.

Social Reform Activities and Samp Sabha

Shri Govind Guru became the spiritual leader of the entire Bhil tribal community and the main leader of social reform. During his travels in Rajasthan, Swami Dayanand Saraswati met Govind Guru. Swamiji was well aware of Govind Guru's work and his influence over society. As a result, he imparted significant knowledge to Govind Guru, which inspired him to rise against the British. It is believed that the monks of the Kota-Bundi Akhada initiated Govind Guru into discipleship through a formal religious ceremony conducted by the ruler of the state. Pleased with Govind Guru's work, they provided him with key principles for success, including always speaking the truth. Following this, in 1911, Govind Guru founded the *Bhagat Panth* movement. In 1905, Govind Guru established the samp sabha with the aim of fostering political and social awareness among the Bhils and organizing them. The purpose was to encourage the Bhils to abandon harmful practices and safeguard their own rights. As a result, the Bhil community began to free themselves from the oppression of landlords and became aware of the injustices they faced. Due to the widespread acceptance of Govind Guru's teachings, his disciples expanded into Bhil villages across Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. The *samp sabha* helped unify and organize the Bhils. Gradually, these assemblies transformed into political organizations, leading to increased awareness among the Bhils in areas such as education, health, religion, worship, spiritual gatherings, and employment.

The Mangarh Massacre and Govind Guru

In the history of India's independence movement, just as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre shook the nation, so did the horrific Mangarh massacre, which left people trembling. Due to the oppression and exploitation by landlords, kings, and the British, the tribal Bhil community was deeply distressed. Inspired by the teachings of Govind Guru, the movement for independence gained momentum, and the desire for a dignified life awakened among the Bhils. Govind Guru, who spearheaded this independence movement, became a thorn in the side of the local rulers, landlords, and even British missionaries. As a result, the ruling elite feared that the Bhil community, united under Govind Guru, might establish an independent state. This led the kings and British rulers of that time to conspire against him, spreading slander through political agents.

The Bhil community, being a part of the tribal population, had long suffered harassment from the British and local rulers. By the end of the 20th century, the Bhils of Rajasthan and Gujarat were reduced to laborers. The severe famine of 1899–1900 in southern India and the Bombay Presidency claimed the lives of over 600,000 people due to poverty and starvation, further worsening the Bhils' condition. Govind Guru, along with the Bhils, submitted a proposal with 33 demands to the British in 1910. The demands primarily focused on abolishing the *veth* (forced labor) system, reducing the high taxes imposed on the Bhils, and addressing the oppression inflicted by both the British and local rulers on Govind Guru's followers.

When the British efforts to pacify the Bhils were rejected, Govind Guru and his followers decided to declare independence from British rule. They resolved to stay at Mangarh Hill and resist. However, on November 17, 1913, the British Indian Army surrounded Mangarh Hill and opened fire on the protesting Bhils. It is said that more than 1,500 Bhil tribal men and women were martyred in this brutal massacre, which has since been remembered in history as the Adivasi Jallianwala Bagh.

Legal Proceedings Against Govind Guru

Due to Govind Guru's leadership, the entire Bhil community became unified and organized, which led to accusations against him of attempting to establish a Bhil kingdom. Consequently, a case was filed against Govind Guru and his followers at Santrampur. The British government then charged Govind Guru and his companions with numerous false accusations, ultimately sentencing them to death. However, after a pardon, Govind Guru and his associates were transferred to Ahmedabad Central Jail.

After serving ten years, Govind Guru was released on the condition that he would not enter the states of Santrampur, Vansvada, Dungarpur, or Kushalgarh. He then moved to Idar, where he started farming to sustain his livelihood. During this time, the local struggle for self-rule (Swaraj) was in full swing. As a result, some of his associates mistakenly brought him to Dahod, unaware of the consequences. When the Dahod police and the Godhra Superintendent became aware of this, they arrested Govind Guru for joining the Swaraj movement. He was sentenced to three years in prison and sent back to Ahmedabad Central Jail.

The Later Life of Govind Guru

After completing his prison sentence, Govind Guru settled in the village of Kamboi, near the Zalod Taluka, where he took up farming to sustain his livelihood. Alongside his agricultural work, he continued to engage in social reform activities. Despite being illiterate, he dedicated his entire life to the upliftment of the Bhil community and to the service of society and the nation. On October 30, 1931, Govind Guru took his final breath in Kamboi, leaving behind a legacy of selfless service and becoming immortal in the hearts of the people.

Conclusion

Govind Guru was born into the Vanjara community, but he dedicated his entire life to the upliftment and development of the Bhil tribals. When we speak of his sacrifice in India's independence movement, it eclipses many others. Throughout his life, he worked tirelessly for social, political, religious, and educational reform, despite being illiterate. His contributions in these areas are still celebrated in history.

Govind Guru is remembered, especially in connection with the Mangarh Massacre, where he became a divine figure for the Adivasi-Bhil community. Today, a university has been established in his name, and lectures are organized to honor his legacy. Sadly, his name is not mentioned as frequently as it should be in history books. Govind Guru's work for the welfare of the underprivileged deserves to be honored and remembered in history.

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