

# Divali

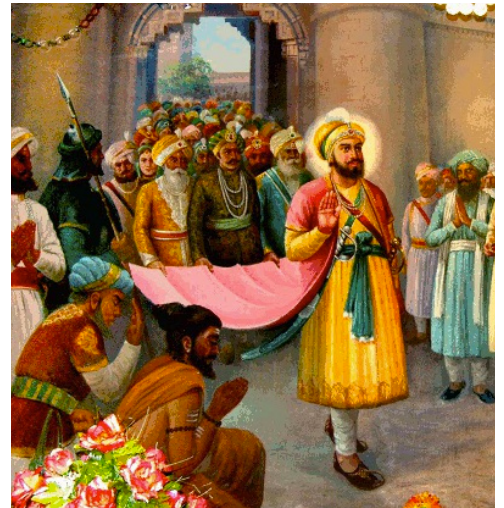
keeping the flame of  
freedom alight



Sikhs throughout the globe will celebrate Divali on 23rd October. Divas/lamps will be lit - a jovial festival atmosphere will prevail. Sweets and samosas will be enjoyed - fireworks will set alight the moonless sky. But why do we really celebrate? Apart from the annual calendar significance, what does Divali mean for us, as Sikhs?

The sixth Guru, Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Jee was falsely imprisoned for spurious reasons by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. After some months it was declared that Guru Jee could walk free. Like Guru Jee there were other prisoners of conscience in Gwalior Fort (the prison). Specifically, 52 Hindu Kings made a heartfelt plea to Guru Jee, begging him to negotiate their release. The ocean of mercy, Guru Jee listened attentively to their plea and showered his grace upon them, telling them not to worry.

Guru Jee told the Emperor he would only leave the prison on the condition that the 52 Hindu Kings are freed also. The Emperor being a man entangled in his own ego and pride of intelligence replied that Guru Jee could walk free with as many Kings who could hold onto his clothing on the day of his release.



Guru Jee the fountain of knowledge easily got around the condition, by getting a robe tailored with 52 tassels on it. On the day of His release Guru Jee walked out of Gwalior Fort with all 52 Hindu Kings holding onto one tassel each. This auspicious occasion is referred to as “Bandi Shorr Divas – the day of emancipation.”

Guru Jee did not only free the 52 Hindu Kings from prison, he also showered His grace upon them and freed them from the transmigration of the soul, liberating them from the cycle of births and deaths. Each and every one of us also begs for this freedom:

**Forsaking all other doors I have come to your door. Preserve my honour by offering the support of your arm, liberate me, I am your humble servant** (Sri Guru Gobind Singh Jee)

**I have come to the sanctuary of the formless and emancipating Lord, who destroys all sufferings.** (Sri Guru Arjan Dev Jee, Limb 624 – Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee)

May Guru Jee also bless us with spiritual and physical liberation.

Bandhi Shorr Divas was months prior to Divali. Upon release from Gwalior Fort, Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Jee made a tour of Delhi and other regions, and thereafter, arrangements to go to Sri Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple), Amritsar were made. When he reached Amritsar, it was Divali and the Sikhs celebrated the release of Guru Jee with fireworks and festivities.

## Relevance today

Thirty years ago in June 1984, the Indian Government led by Indira Gandhi attacked Harmander Sahib, where so many years ago the Sixth Guru had arrived after being freed from prison. Indira Gandhi was subsequently assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards. Some Sikhs started to burn her effigies in 1984 and some still do at Divali and on Halloween, the date that she was assassinated. Whilst this may be seen as an extreme act, we must reflect upon it in terms of what else people around the globe do at this time of year.

Hindus across the globe burn effigies of the demonic King of Sri Lanka – Ravanna, who was killed by Lord Rama (the Hindu Avatar) thousands of years ago. On the 5th November in the UK, effigies of Guy Fawkes are burnt on bonfires throughout the land. Ravanna attacked and oppressed the faithful and virtuous – Lord Rama rightfully put him to his death. Burning Ravanna's effigies is part of the Indian national conscious as a victory of good over evil. Guy Fawkes had planned to bomb the British Parliament – he was caught and died as a result of the torture.

In reflection Indira Gandhi committed both the crimes of Ravanna and Guy Fawkes – she ordered a full scale army assault against the capital of universal faith and progressive thought – Harmander Sahib, Amritsar in June 1984 and had earlier oppressed Indians through a state of emergency in the late 1970's. In the army attack of Amritsar – numerous Guru Granth Sahibs, the living embodiment of the Ten Sikh Guru's were burnt, shot, stolen and destroyed by the Indian army.

One of the Guru Granth Sahibs that was in the Harmander Sahib during the attack received a bullet wound and has a bullet lodged in it, at page 84. The Indian Army's attack also destroyed the Sikh Parliament – the Akaal Takhat. The bullet lodged at page 84 – is imploring us to never forget 1984! Indira Gandhi will be seen in the same vein as Ravanna and Guy Fawkes by many people all over the world.

Turning our attention to present day prisoners – the world has countless prisoners of consciousness, held under false fabricated charges and/or those held for standing up for justice, freedom and righteousness. Please light a candle for these prisoners, non-Sikhs and Sikh.

Guru Hargobind Jee was benevolent, humane and had a profound love for one and all, may we develop such divine virtues. He has set a precedent for us to follow – never forget how Guru Jee used his intelligence to release the Hindu Kings. May we all endeavour to assist and support such prisoners and at the very least we can all make a heartfelt prayer that Guru Jee blesses all prisoners with Chardi Kala/High Spirits.

One cannot begin to imagine what it is like to lose freedom of movement and action by being imprisoned. We can only try to empathise with such prisoners. Regardless of the regime and its tyranny, no man-made authority can imprison the Sikh Spirit. Sikhs still happily go to the gallows for standing up for justice, freedom and righteousness. The Sikh Spirit cannot be imprisoned.

Prominent Sikhs currently imprisoned include Dr. Davinderpal Singh Bhullar, Bhai Deya Singh Lahoria, Bhai Balwant Singh Rajoana, Bhai Paramjeet Singh Bheora, Bhai Jagtar Singh Hawara, Bhai Pal Singh (France), Bhai Narain Singh Chaura and the list goes on and on.

Just imagine being the parent of a child who entered militancy or quite simply 'disappeared' in the 80's and 90's in Punjab. Many of these parents light a candle at Divali, praying and wishing that the light of hope may still bless them with the vision of their healthy son or daughter. Or, they pray in despair, that may God nurture their offspring wherever they may be.

Bhai Gurbaksh Singh tried to free some prisoners who had already served their sentences in India by going on hunger strike. He had hoped to extend his campaign to free all Indian prisoners who had served their sentences but were still being held in captivity. Let us support such campaigns and organisations that work to these humanitarian aims and make this Divali one of thought, deed and celebration.

So when you light a candle and eat a sweet on Divali, please spare a thought, that you are free and are not bound by the restraints of prison life. Lest we forget, let's light a lamp to ensure the rays of freedom shine through all of humanity.

Harjinder Singh, 2014  
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