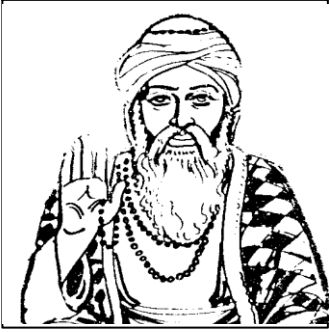


THE BIRTH OF A STAR – Guru Nanak Dev



Bharat Mata, the ancient Mother of ours, which gave birth to sages of highest calibre, the land of great luminaries - seers, saints and sages who have been guiding stars of Bharat since time immemorial. Their message has been of universal brotherhood and welfare for everyone, regarding 'the whole universe as one family' that belongs in the Vedic dictum of *Vasudhaive Kutumbkam*. One such sage was Guru Nanak Devji.

It was in this world torn by hate and religious strife that a divine event took place. On *Vaisakh Sudi 3, 1526 Vikram Era* (corresponding 15 April 1469) at Talwandi now called Nankana Sahib about 40 miles to the southwest city of Luv (Lahor), a child was born with radiating light. Nanak was the name given to him by his Hindu parents, Mehta Kalyan (Kalu) Das the father, and Tripta Devi the mother. The parents must have been repositories of exceptional gifts. Their child was destined to be a teacher with an abiding message. The ancestry of Guru Nanak was traceable to "Suryavanshi" Kshatriya clan, which had at times given birth to great scholars who used to expound the Vedas to the congregations keen to learn the true meaning of Dharma. They were known for their bravery, learning, wisdom, integrity and scholarship and were known as Vedis (writers of Vedas) . Guru Nanak describes his lineage as:

*Suraj kul te Raghu bhaya raghuvansi bhaya Ram
Ramchandra ke do sut, Lav Kush teh nam
Voh hamara bade hai, jugo jug avtar
Unehi se ghar upjau, Nanak ke avatar*

In the Solar dynasty, there was a king Raghu and into the Raghu Family Lord Rama was born. He had two sons, Luv and Kush. They are our ancestors who came to this earth, as avatars, time again. Into this dynasty Nanak was born as Kalyug Avatar.

There are legends connected with his birth and childhood of a very fascinating nature. The baby Nanak bore upon him the imprint of greatness, and the family astrologer, who saw him soon after his birth forecasting his horoscope, worshiped him with clasped hands and predicted the child would wear umbrella, a symbol of divine dignity.

The child Nanak was so handsome, with mystic charm, a radiance that was new to earth'. From his infancy he cast a spell that conquered the hearts of everyone who was blessed to be in his company. His sister Nanki, who was elder to him by five years, from his very childhood, saw in him the light of God. She was the very first inspired by a message from Heaven to be his disciple. A child of smiles his eyes silent and wise, he loved all things spiritual, he loved joy and thought. Whoever saw the child or touched him accidentally, felt enlightened. A thrill of unknown delight came to anyone who lifted the child or played with him.

As a boy Nanak was not only the cynosure of his parent's eyes but also the centre of attraction for the whole town. His radiant face, impressive behaviour, wonderful memory and love for God surprised and impressed everyone. At the age of seven, Nanak was sent to the local-Brahmin teacher from whom he learnt reading and writing Hindi, Punjabi and Sanskrit. All his teachers

were immensely impressed at his intellectual brilliance and spiritual maturity even at this tender age. The Village Chief, Rao Bular always made obeisance to him and called him “The Blessed One”. He soon exhausted the stock of learning that his teacher had to offer.

Nanak the child gave the signs of ‘Nanak the Guru’ and ‘Saviour’ at a very early age. As a boy he ate little, slept little and lost himself in his own thoughts, in his own world for days and no one could understand him. From childhood Nanak was contemplative and eagerly sought the company of holy people, sadhus to tread the way to ultimate Reality.

Young Nanak was so much immersed in God and had become so ‘engrossed on the Lord’ that his mind was always fixed on Him and for some time he would do nothing but meditate on His Name and sing His praises. People around him suspected that he was suffering from some psychological disorder. Even a physician was called in to cure him of his illness. The Guru smiled at this misconception and said:

*‘Physician go thy way; Few know my malady.
My body groans, because my soul is crying,
It is not a case for thy healing,
The Creator has given me this pain, He alone can remove it’.*

Nanak became sympathetic towards the down trodden and was always yearning to alleviate the sufferings of the destitute so much so that he began sharing everything with the Yogis, sadhus and the needy. He distributed his possessions to the needy and even gave away his cooking utensils, clothes, food and pocket money in charity – *daridra devo bhave*. His father, Kalu Chand Mehta objected to his so called ‘wasteful habits’ and frequently admonished him for his habit of spending money, but to no purpose.

He was deeply interested in Indian lore and in the writings of the contemporary bhagats (saints) in particular whose teachings he compared with his own philosophy on life. In company with ascetics and sages he learnt much about the intricacies of life.

His scholarly attainment were superb as shown by his erudite compositions like the Japji, Asa-Divar, and Onkar.

He recited the Moolmantra and sloka verses. The Moolmantra (basic concept) is:

<i>Ek Oankar</i>	<i>There is only one God,</i>
<i>Satnam, Karta Purakh,</i>	<i>His name is eternal truth, The all pervading Creator,</i>
<i>Nirbhau, Nirvair,</i>	<i>Without fear, Without hatred,</i>
<i>Akal Murat,</i>	<i>The timeless being - Immortal,</i>
<i>Ajuni, Saibhang,</i>	<i>Unborn, Self existent,</i>
<i>Guru Prasad</i>	<i>The Enlightener accessible through (Guru’s) Grace.</i>

Nanak was the essence of humanity. He preached with vehemence against idol worship, hypocrisy, ritualism, dogma and superstitions and distinctions of castes of the religious leaders and that “the purpose and meaning of true human life is to worship God and God alone”. But in so doing he never uttered a word, which savoured of personal ambition; neither did he arrogate to himself the attributes of God.

*“There is only one God; Adopt one and reject all others,
Why should one worship a second who is born and death?”*

From the beginning he had a protestant and critical frame of mind. At the age of nine, when he was asked to go through the ceremony of *Yajnopavitam*, he refused to wear the sacred thread saying that *'he would rather have a thread that would neither break nor get dirty, nor be burnt or lost'*.

Nanak had times of isolation and truancy from work and plays and showed little inclination to take any professional job. But his father wanted him to settle down and work to earn livelihood. Worried about his son's strange conduct, Mehta Kalu sent him to Sultanpur where the Guru's sister, Nanki lived. Her husband Jai Ram secured a job with local governor as a storekeeper for Nanak. His love for God became more intense than before. On one occasion while supervising the grain store, he stopped dead at the count of 13 – which in Hindusthani is the word 'tera', also meaning 'I am thine' and he went on counting tera, tera, tera while measure after measure of grains was being given out.

One morning, as usual the Nanak went to bathe at the nearby stream. As he dipped into the water, he disappeared into the bed of river. The searchers presumed that he was drowned. When he returned after three days, he had gone into a trance to be with the Almighty God through the ancient Vedic Yoga called – '*jalastambha samadhi*' (Trance into Water)- a skill that requires a teacher and is acquired only after long practice; however, Nanak Devji had inherited this gift from birth.

Divine thirst was making him unbearable. He went to Srinagar in Kashmir and thence proceeded to the solitudes of the Himalayas to meet the realised souls. To them, Nanak related his feelings thus: *"I have become perplexed in my search, In the darkness I find no way, Devoted to pride I weep in sorrow. Alas, how shall peace be obtained?"* Himalayan solitude was not without reward. It was here that through meeting of the holy Sadhus, he was able to get his introduction to the "True One". He did have the first flashes of the light and trances much earlier, but this was something prominent. Nanak was enlightened.

In the teachings of Guru Nanak, morality holds a very high place, purity of life as the highest object of human endeavour. Truth surpasses all, but higher still is true living.

He expounded the teachings of Lord Krishna in Gita, Nanak says: - *"The heart must be purified of all egoistic and selfish tendencies and surrendered completely to the Will of Divine. Hatred, greed, lust, hypocrisy, arrogance, envy, and jealousy – these evil thoughts and tendencies are a barrier to approaching God. Love, truth, contentment, humility, mercy and purity of mind have to be cultivated to make life meaningful"*.

**"Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in knowledge and Yoga,
charity, self-control, austerity, truth, freedom from anger,
renunciation, tranquillity and aversion to slander, gentleness,
and absence of fickleness, courage, forgiveness, freedom
from malice and pride, - these belong to him
who is born with divine traits"- Gita –1/3**

Dharma (righteous conduct) that is devoid of karma (action) is contradiction; it is through actions that we go near or fall apart from God.

*"Words do not a saint or a sinner make; Action alone is written in the book of fate.
What we sow, that alone we take; O, Nanak, be saved or forever transmigrate".*

"O Dhananjaya, perform your actions...Freed from the fetters of birth, they attain the state that is beyond all evil" – Gita 3/48, 51

*“What was with thee when you entered the world?
Like a greedy moth thou art attached to the pleasures;
Thy heart should remain devoted to the Lord;
Nanak, thou shalt go back to thy home with honour.”*

As a messenger of God he spoke nothing but what came to him from his Master; Guru Nanak interpreted the divine commandments so well that it became possible to live one's life by three aphorisms:

*“Keerat Karo” – earn your livelihood the hard honest way;
“Wand Chhako” - share what you earn with the needy and the deprived;
“Nam Jap” – remember God always and ever”.*

Like our earlier saints and seers, Guru Nanak travelled thousands of miles to spread his message. He travelled for almost thirty years.

Nanak was exalted as the Guru and at the divine call; he set off on four long journeys, mostly on foot into trackless lands. In the East he visited Jagan Nath Puri, the centre of Hinduism and he reached Tibet in the north and visited Sri Lanka in the south. In the west he went as far as Mecca. He was perhaps the greatest traveller of his times. His approach was direct, scientific and convincing. At Mecca he slept with his feet towards the Kabba, which gave rise to a lot of anger and resentment. Asked to explain why he slept with his feet towards the ‘house of God’ he only said “Drag my feet away to that direction in which God has no house”. In a rage as he dragged Guru's feet in the opposite direction, the Kabba followed the revolutions of his body.

Guru stopped at Baghdad. To mark his visit, an inscription has been made on the stone saying: “*In memory of the Guru, the Divine Master Baba Nanak this building has been raised afresh with the help of seven Saints*”.

Guru Nanak was blessed with extraordinary talents and had a remarkable and courageous aptitude for debate. He was blessed with a sharp intellect and had acumen to weigh up those he met. During his journeys he met people of different beliefs and expounded his views on almost every topic, political, social, religious and metaphysical. The pivot of his teachings was adoration of one God. He rejected the agency of any intermediary and never claimed any kinship with God. With all the humility at his command he only said:

“Here I am, composed of five elements, and my name is Nanak”.

When he was returning, Babar was invading India (1521AD), according to the Guru's own words, which are part of ‘Babar-Vani’ (cf. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p722). The Guru was an eyewitness to the sack of Saidpur and the wholesale massacre of its inhabitants. Seeing the arson, loot and plunder, his heart bled and in anguish he sang laments for murder and uttered some of the most touching verses which he himself calls ‘hymns of blood’: -

*God took Khurasan under His wing and
Exposed India to the terrorism of Babar.
The Creator takes no blame unto himself,
It was the death that made war on us.
When there was such slaughter, such groaning
Didst Thou not feel the agony, O Lord?
Creator, thou belongest to all.*

He called the invading army ‘a part of sinners’. He was painted to find them destroying art and culture and distressed that the people of Bharat had become cowards.

“Look, the dogs are destroying our art, And you are deep in slumber”.

He denounced the Kshatriyas (warrior class) of the country as ‘merely cows’ and said:

*“Kshatriyas suffer from dereliction of duty
And have even accepted invader’s language,
They call their fathers ‘Mean’, each and all,
And have started speaking a different language”.*

“He appealed to the national spirit of the people and exhorted them to rise for the defence of the motherland.

“Happy indeed are the kshatriyas, O Partha, to whom comes such a war, offering itself unsought, opening the gate to heaven. But if you refuse to wage this righteous war, then, renouncing your own dharma and honour, you will certainly incur sin. Dishonour is worse than death”. – Gita 2/32,33,51.

He was imprisoned and sentenced to hard labour and one of his followers Bhai Tara was burnt alive. Very boldly he raised his voice against the Muslim rulers, which could have cost his life. He criticised them for their mal-administration, unjust taxation, religious intolerance, greed, lust, luxury and laxity of morals.

*“Sin is the king, greed the minister,
Falsehood the mint master, and lust the deputy to take council with,
They sit and confer together,
Kings fierce wolves and their assistants bloodthirsty dogs,
Kings butchers, cruelty their knife,
Righteousness taken wings and disappeared.
The darkest night prevails and the moon of truth visible nowhere”.*

After a life of travels, Guru settled down at Kartarpur on the banks of river Ravi in Punjab. He founded a new town, Kartarpur (*meaning the creator’s city*) on a piece of land offered by Karori, a rich man from Lahore, and he too became Guru’s disciple. There he kept a small farm and in the community that grew, were developed the principles and practice of service to God and man. Here many travellers would come and be fed. Thus he passed his last days in bringing to an ever-growing populace his teachings of love to God and service to humanity.

Time had now arrived for him to find a successor to carry on his mission. A noble young man bearing the name Lehna, who lived in Khadur, was a great worshipper of the Goddess Durga. He came into contact with Bhai Jodh who was a true devotee of God. Lehna made enquiries and came to know that Bhai Jodh was devoted to Guru Nanak. It was a matter of chance that he happened to listen to the recitation of Japji – Guru Nanak’s spiritual text. Instantly he became rooted to the spot. Lehna was deeply impressed. Bhai Lehna with his friends decided to visit Guru Nanak at Kartarpur. At the outskirts of the colony he saw a divine personage wearing simple clothes, standing in the fields. He enquired whether he could be guided to Guru Nanak. While Lehna was riding a horse, his companion walked on with him and after some time indicated the place where Guru Nanak was living. Lehna stopped to collect the presents, which he wanted to offer to the Guru. When he went inside, he found that his guide had been no other than Guru himself. The event caused a spontaneous illumination in him. Bhai Lehna fell at the feet of the Master. Guru Nanak asked him his name. The answer was “Lehna” (one who receives). Guru Nanak immediately observed, *“Then you being ‘Lehna’ you will receive whatever I can give”*. The smiling face of the great Guru lit in the new disciple an eternal flame. It is stated that Lehna had to pass through several hard tests. One day, something had fallen

into a ditch. Guru Nanak in turn asked his two sons Siri Chand and Lakhmi Das to take the article out of the dirty ditch. They pleaded their inability. When in turn Guru asked Lehna, he did not have a second thought and at once dived into the ditch and brought out the article. There were similar other tests to find out the disciple's degree of humility and obedience without which no one can be expected to set himself up as a teacher. Guru Nanak felt convinced that it was Bhai Lehna who was to be imparted the light contained in the Guru himself. He was to be the torchbearer after him. He conferred on him the name 'Angad' (born of his limb). The moment arrived when Guru Nanak in the presence of all his followers, bowed before Lehna and pronounced that he had become Guru Angad Dev, the second Master, Guru.

Finally, on 22nd September 1539 at the age of seventy, Guru Nanak Devji's soul left his mortal body at Kartarpur.

These days when antipodes have become neighbours and the human race yearns for peace on earth and is starving for lack of love, Guru Nanak's message has a special value; it would seem most suited to our modern times. He represents humanity, not separate, divide people but to unite the brothers and sisters of a world as the citizens of mother earth, *Vasudhev Kutumbkam* – the whole world is one big family as prescribed in the Vedas. To bring concord, unity and harmony in the strife-torn world and to make our lives richer, fuller and more meaningful, we have to depend on a code of conduct like the one propounded by Guru Nanak. It is time we comprehend his philosophy and demonstrate its practically.

Guru Nanak added to the galaxy of spiritual masters by "soaring to the loftiest heights of divine love and vision". His life is full of illuminating acts, which educated the people's mind to acquire faith in God. His teachings dispelled superstitions, he said: -

*If I had a hundred thousand tongues instead of one,
And the hundred thousand multiplied twenty-four,
A hundred thousand times, would I say, and say again,
The Lord of all the people is ONE.*

Guru Nanak's Bani has plenty of devotional hymns in praise of Vishnu, Rama and Krishna. He paints charming picture in adoration of Lord Jagannath, such as:

*"Gagan mein thal Chand Deepak, Bane Tarika Mandal Janak Moti,
Dhoop Malanale Pavan Chavro, Kare Baurai Phulant Joti,
Kaisi Aarati Hoi".*

Heavens are the plate, the sun and moon perform arati with stars arrayed like pearls and the breeze carrying sandal odour like incense, what an arati it is.

*"Sakha sab taji gave, Kou na nibhay sath,
Kahu Nanak iha vipati mein, Tek ek Raghunath"*

Friends and companions have all forsaken, none willing to lead a hand;
Nanak says the only refuge in this difficult hour is Raghunath.

*"Ramkatha jug jug atal, Sab koi bhakhat net,
Surag bas Raghubar, Kara Sagri puri samet".*

The story of Rama is remembered age after age, and recounted by all:
Raghubir left for swarga taking the whole town of Ayodhya with him.

