

## **Guru Nanak - His Life And Teachings**

***Chanan Singh B.A.\****

There is an eternal law inherent in the scheme of things that whenever man yields to the forces of darkness and gives way to the beast in him, there appears on the stage a force of regeneration and brings about resuscitation and resurrection of the ethical and spiritual values. Empires have come and gone: heroes were and were not; but this eternal law has kept the human caravan going on, now through mist and fog, now in the bright sunshine.

In the fifteenth century India, things were bleak and dismal: the people had been cut off from their spiritual and moral moorings and groaned under the iron heel of the oppression and suppression of the foreign rulers who bent all their might and main to chase the Hindu "Trimurti" out of the bounds of India. At this hour of extreme degradation of the human soul, the revitalising force reincarnated itself in Guru Nanak whose advent, in the words of Bhai Gurdas, the Aristotle of the Sikh World, "dispelled from the face of this earth the sombre darkness of the deviation from the path of rectitude".

Born at Talwandi (now Nankana Sahib), the Holy Land of the Sikhs, in the year 1469 A.D., the Guru raised the standard of revolt against the prevailing irreligion and dogmatic beliefs when he was but a child. The Pundit who came to baptise him and the teachers who were employed to teach him could not subject him to their mundane practices. They fell under his influence and declared that the child was a celestial being. Among his play-mates, he preached the glory of God; and with the alchemy of his divine word, he transformed them into true devotees of God. He grew up, he married and had children; but a day came when he set out on a mission of spreading his gospel of love, tolerance and universal brotherhood and humility, to the distant lands. He travelled from Siberia to Ceylon and from snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas to the scorching sands of Arabia, blazing a trail of divine ecstasy that brought, like the vernal breath, the message of a new lease of life to the decaying humanity.

After his journeys through different climes and countries on his mission of uplifting the degraded humanity, he settled down at Kartarpur which became a sanctuary for thousands upon thousands of people who daily visited him to listen to his divine words.

The Guru's selfless devotion to the uplift of human soul and society made him an object of deep-rooted veneration and affection of the people of all religious denominations. When, after seventy one years of sojourn in this world, returned to his eternal abode, there arose a dispute between his Muslim and Hindu followers over the question of the disposing of his remains: Hindus wanted to cremate them and the Muslims wanted to inter them. When the sheet which covered him, as he lay, was lifted, the remains had disappeared. They shared the sheet and performed their respective obsequies; such was the love they cherished for him. They loved him because he was the soul of love. Amor omnia vincit.

When Guru Nanak appeared on the stage, religion meandered in the labyrinth of formalism and superstition; and, instead of inspiring man to attain the empyrean height which is his abode, it left him broken-winged, as it chained him fast to mere absurdities. To obtain salvation, people severed all connections with this world, retired to forests where they subjected themselves to severe self-mortification, they worshipped idols as a result of the anthropomorphic conception of God preached by some religions, and they cut the throats of other humans to secure for themselves a place in paradise. In order to give deliverance to man from this preposterousness, he launched a campaign to destroy these perverse beliefs and to create new spiritual and ethical values.

He has brought to the world a monotheistic religion which conceives God as an all-pervading principle embracing all virtues and excellences. In the preamble to Japji Sahib, the cornerstone of the Holy Granth, he says "God is one and pervades all. He is truth and source of all creation. He is free from all fear and does not strike fear in any heart. He is self-existent and co-extensive with Eternity." Talking of life, whether on earth or sea, thus spoke Guru Nanak, "Out of the Formless Infinite come the forms and finite beings, never hasting, never resting." Viewed thus, man is the reflection of the Divine Effulgence and the flesh of His flesh and the bone of His bone. According to his tenets, the highest object of life is to obtain communion with God, which can be achieved by following the path of love and not the path of knowledge, the Brahminical formula for gaining oneness with God. "Heart saturated with Love is the mint where man is cast in the image of God. There is no need to know the Unknowable. As rivers flow to the sea, with their song, let us flow on to the Infinite, not knowing how wide is the ocean's flood".

This conception of God, man and human-divine relations brings the attainment of spiritual emancipation within easy reach of all and frees the "man in the street" from the clutches of the priestly classes which have exploited religion for their own selfish ends for centuries, claiming themselves to be the representatives of God on this earth; and have clung to society like parasites.

The teachings of Guru Nanak have gone a long way to ameliorate the social condition of the underdog by demolishing the barriers created by the watertight compartments into which the mankind has come to be divided due to divergent castes, creeds and faiths. Through his preachings, he sought to establish the reign of equality, fraternity and justice. To pride-ridden people who look down upon their fellow beings, he says, "All men are the same, nor more nor less. They are the reflections of the same Divine Effulgence. The vanity of your blood and state will leave you in the lurch, for you will be judged by your actions. As one does, so shall one reap. The Court of God separates chaff from wheat". He preached humility as the greatest of all virtues. "Humility", says he, "is the essence of all virtues and excellences".

Guru Nanak accords to woman, who had been relegated to a very low position by the religious doctrines prevalent at his time, her rightful place in society. "Why should one" says he, "who is the bearer of kings and queens be so looked down upon?"

Guru Nanak has given the world torn with class and racial prejudices, a democratic religion which seeks to weld the entire mankind into one homogeneous society where

all high or low, man or woman, are equal and live a life devoted to right actions so that they march on, like the water in a river flowing to the sea whence it had departed, to attain complete merger with Godhead, the source of all life.

\* Teacher (deceased) at the former Duke of Gloucester School, Nairobi, Kenya. First published in 1955 in the "Pioneer" the then monthly bulletin of the E.A. Sikh Association.