

Guru Nanak Nirankari

I have fond memories of reading about Guru Nanak-dev from my early childhood. Two incidents of his life that I had read when I was quite young have remained enshrined in my mind. The first related to the child Nanak being asked to look after the family shop for a while. While counting cupfuls of grain, the little boy could not count past thirteen because after saying 'terah' (meaning thirteen in the vernacular), he would go into a divine daze and continue to repeat 'terah terah terah ...' This was because 'terah' also means 'yours' and to the young Nanak everything belonged to the Supreme Divine Lord. There ended all his counting and other worldly thoughts!! The second incident was when someone informed a lying down Nanak-dev that his feet were pointing towards a sacred place of God, the Guru softly asked the person to turn his feet in the direction where God did not exist!! I often take a memorable recourse to both the incidents whenever I tend to lose track in life.

The life-scripture of Guru Nanak-dev is one of the finest examples of how it is possible to follow the path of Truth and attain Supreme Divine realization while remaining in the milieu of society - dutiful yet unattached. Every article that I have read on his life - from the comic book style of Amar

Chitra Katha to those that cover his profound yet simple philosophy - are unputdownable. This great spiritual light appeared on the sacred day of Raas Purnima in the year 1469 in the household of an ordinary but reasonably well off Kshatriya family of farmers in the village of Rai Bhoi di Talwandi (now famous

as Nankana Sahib), a short distance from Lahore in the Punjab Province (now a part of Pakistan). Sree Sree Maa told me, "As is seen during the appearance of avatars, it is said that the heavenly beings comprising the thirty-three crore Devatas, sixty-four Yoginis, fifty-two Veers, seven Rishis, eighty-four crore Siddha-Purushas and nine Nathas, all lined up the cosmic skies during the illuminated descent of this great soul to pay their respects and hail the glory of Earth's fortune. A lifelong siddha (perfected being), this divine soul

- considered by many saints of this holy land to be the great 'Videhadhipati Rajarshi Janaka'¹ - had taken the human form of Nanak-dev for a special mission on this earth."

From his childhood, Nanak was different from others. He never felt the urge to engage in fun and frolic play with boys of his age, remaining rather aloof on his own, often deeply absorbed in himself and his inner thoughts. Material studies never appealed to



¹ Rajarshi (or sage-king) Janaka was a fully illuminated, self-realized monarch who ruled over the land of Videha with capital in Mithila. He is famous as the father of Devi Sita. There are numerous tales of this great king's spiritual enlightenment. Other than being the Lord of Videha, he is also known as Videhadhipati in the philosophical sense because he never considered himself to be a mere body, but a master of the unembodied (videhi), unencumbered spirit.

him, neither did normal household work. Even as a child, words of great wisdom would come out of his lips, as if the scriptures were speaking in the language of the common people. For example, when his father - seeing his son apparently idling away his time in a morose state of laziness - exhorted him to work in the farm to cultivate the fields, the young lad told his father in his inimitable language (whose translation means),

*"In the fields of this body, sow the seeds
of sat-karma,
Sprinkle on them water from the stream of
Japa-Nama;
Let mind, the cultivator, firmly root Hari in
the heart,
The harvest of Nirvana shall be yours,
never to depart.*

*Perverted thoughts and deeds spoil the
good crop,
Forsake them and plunge into the soul
non-stop;
With prayer, penance, restraint guarding
your field,
Gyan-Lotus shall flower, dripping with
amrita-yield.*

*Purify the body-field with works of
niskama-atma-karma,
Sow as seeds words of the Guru, water
with Truth-dharma;
Be a farmer, planting the tree of True-
Faith firmly within,
And know the paths leading to paradise
and hell therein."*

On reaching his seventh year his father sent Nanak to a teacher (Guru Mahashay) who engraved the thirty-five letters of the (Indian) alphabet on a plate and asked him to start learning it. Seeing it Nanak immediately remarked, "Om Satugur prasadi", implying that the true blessing (prasadi) or gift from a real teacher is the realized knowledge of Om and through Om everything can be learnt,

since all creation including the varnamalas (alphabet) manifest from Om - the seed of creation. Through similar interactions the teacher quickly gauged the extraordinary talent and depth of knowledge of the young lad. He shortly returned Nanak to his father with the remark that 'he really does not have much to learn from me'. Later, as a fully realized master, on this topic Nanak would say,

*"All are powered by the Force of One
Lord,
Learning this One Word, we see only
God."*

There are hundreds of events in Guru Nanak's life that provide priceless, timeless teachings. One such memorable incident is beautifully depicted in Sree Sree Maa's article 'Sandhya Arati in Sri Jagannath Puri', an English version of which goes as follows:

'Sri Guru Nanak-dev had embarked on a pilgrimage across the breadth of the great Indian sub-continent. Returning from his eastern sojourn through Assam, East and West Bengal, he reached Srikshetra or Puri, the abode of Lord Jagannath - as the idol of Vishnu Bhagwan is referred to here - on the sea coast. The ancient temple of Lord Jagannath-dev is a sacred pilgrimage for Hindus. Millions of devotees converge here every year for darshan of the Lord of the Worlds. During the time of visit of Guru Nanak, blind faith in external idol worship had reached a stage of stark superstition in the minds of the people. The Ratha Yatra (Chariot-Ride) Festival, which takes place around July, is possibly the most important event of the year in Puri. During this festival, the Lords, namely, Sri Jagannath, Sree Subhadra and Sri Balarama are taken out in a grand procession on three large, beautifully decorated chariots. Such was the level of superstition that people, hoping for immediate salvation to the heavenly above of Lord Vishnu, would fall below the chariot wheels and quite often succumb to the injuries. In his inimitable style Guru

Nanak showed the people of this holy land that such sort of blindness was not the right way of reaching God.

On reaching Puri, Guru Nanak set his asana a distance away from the Sri Jagannath temple premises. He was a melodious singer. Sitting on his asana, every morning and evening he would sing bhajans, many of which were his own compositions. Such was the divine magnetism of his kirtans that he was soon surrounded by a large gathering of wonderstruck pilgrims listening to his heavenly music. At the end of his bhajans, Sri Nanak-dev would be engulfed into a deep meditative state, his eyes closed. Quite a while later he would exclaim, “O Kripalu, all-powerful Paramatma, I thank you a million times!” Saying this he would perform pranam, open his eyes and look around at everyone with love-lit compassion. He would then begin to extol the glories of the omnipresent, omniscient, all-powerful and eternally compassionate Paramatma in his inimitable poetic manner. As his sayings went into the hearts and minds of the onlookers, their ignorance, doubts, sorrow and pain began to peel off as divine bliss made its way in. Such satsang continued for several days. Soon people in Srikshetra (Puri) began to recognize Sri Nanak-dev as a perfected divine personality. The community at large began to respect and love him. However, the Brahmin priests, who made a living by confining people within the darkness of superstition, remained unperturbed. Taking recourse to the scriptures they tried to subdue Guru Nanak with volleys of arguments. However, in front of Sri Nana-dev’s deep love, self-realized knowledge, unshakeable faith, immaculate behaviour and foresight, these mischievous attempts failed miserably. They were unable to confront this magnanimous

personality and were forced to retract and finally accept the greatness of Guru Nanak and the truth of his words.

One day, as the sun set and evening’s shadows elongated, it was time for the Sandhya-Arati (Evening Worship) of Lord Jagannath-dev. The chief priest and others invited Sri Nanak-dev to join the assembly for the Lord’s arati. Sri Nanak-dev delightfully accepted. On entering the sanctum sanctorum he saw a large lighted lamp placed on a big plate made of gold. This was surrounded by several smaller bejeweled lamps. Alongside were several silver plates full of bhog-prasad (delicious food items offered to the Lord and later received by devotees as consecrated blessings²). A few priests were waving chamars (hand-fans) to fan the idols. On the temple arena, musical instruments for arati were being played. The priest lifted the large lighted gold lamp and began his arati of Lord Jagannath-dev. Songs and mantras in the praise of the Lord reverberated in the air. It was a uniquely wonderful ambience. However, Guru Nanak’s mind was suddenly lifted out of the temple arati. He left the inner hall and came out in the open arena of the temple complex, looked around and remained deep in contemplation. The divine inner skies opened up within him in their full glory and in every breath he could feel an ongoing inner arati of the Infinite Power permeating him. Touched by such a divine manifestation, Sri Nanak-dev lost his outer consciousness and dived into the inner world. By this time the arati of Lord Jagannath was over and the priests found that Sri Nanak-dev was missing from the assembly. They were very annoyed and expressed their displeasure to him. Softly Sri Nanak-dev told them, “Brothers, I have not broken my promise. In your view I could not remain externally attentive to your arati.

² The bhog-prasad of the Sri Jagannath Puri temple is very well known for its unique cooking style, variety and taste that has been retained through centuries by generations of temple cooks.

That is because I was completely engrossed in experiencing true arati of the Lord. You, however, did not participate in that arati at all. Therefore it is I who should be complaining.”

Hearing this, the priests found themselves in a difficult and uncomfortable position. They asked Sri Nanak-dev, “Can we know what sort of arati you were performing alone?” Then Sri Nanak-dev began his famous “Arati Song” –

*In the platter of the Skies, the Sun and
Moon shine as lamps,
The constellation of Stars are scattered as
pearls;
The scented Breeze wafts as Thy incense,
While the Wind gently fans Thee;
The entire Verdure forms Thy bouquet of
flowers,
Glowing in luminous delight;
As the primal anahata sound floats
motionlessly-
What a splendid arati of yours is being
displayed O Lord*

Hearing this divine song, the people around were astounded. At the end of the song, Guru Nanak-dev went into Samadhi. Seeing such divinity manifested in him, people felt that they were seeing the expressed Lord Jagannath Himself. The vibhuti of Sri Jagannath-tattwa began to show on the Guru. Through this it became established that realization of the true Lord Jagannath (as the Lord of the Cosmic World) within a human being is His real worship and arati. External worship acts are merely symbolic demonstrations of the actual inner Truth.’

On reading this, I noted that Guru Nanak and Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu’s lives overlapped at some point in time. Could they have met? I checked and confirmed that Mahaprabhu was indeed there at the time of Guru Nanak’s visit. Some documentation on this is available from the Oriyan classic Chaitanya Bhagwat of Ishwar Das and is also mentioned by scholars in the Sikh tradition. I

wondered for a moment that if I had one wish now, I would have liked to be present at that meeting!! It is said that ecstatic sankirtana took place when they met. I can only imagine what it could have been and I know that my imagination will be far less than what it actually was.

I asked Sree Sree Maa about who this great soul was and why she was so personally emotional when speaking about him. Sree Sree Maa related an incident, “I was residing in the Salt Lake area of Kolkata at that time. One day, Sri Sri Baba came to our place in the morning. While resting in my puja room in a half-lying position, he was keenly observing the nitya-puja I was performing of the enthroned deities and asking a variety of questions. During the conversation he asked, ‘Nitai Baba was a Trikalagya Rishi. Tell me what Trikalagya means?’ I answered. Amidst the discussion on ‘One who knows the three kaals’, the topic of previous earthly births of various Mahatmas cropped up. On being asked whether Sri Sri Shyamacharan Lahiri Mahashay was Mahatma Kabir, Sri Sri Baba said, ‘He was indeed - one hundred percent. There is no doubt about it.’ Then he asked me, ‘Can you tell me who Guru Nanak was?’ Immediately the thought of Sri Sri Nanga Baba came to my mind. But, in order to hear it from Sri Sri Baba in his own words, I asked, ‘Was Nanak-dev also Shyamacharan Lahiri Mahashay?’ Hearing this, Sri Sri Baba immediately sat up straight and remarked, ‘No, No. It is not correct. Tell me correctly.’ With me keeping quiet, he pointed to the photo of Sri Sri Nanga Baba saying, ‘There - he was Guru Nanak-dev.’ He then asked, ‘Why did you tell me the wrong answer?’ As I continued to keep mum, he thought for a while and then said, ‘O, I see. This is the matter! Forcing me to say it? Ya Devi Sarvabhuteshu, Buddhi-Rupena Samsthitah, Namastasye, Namastasye, Namastasye Namah. You played a clever trick? Okay.’

Immediately, I touched his lotus feet for a silent pranam. That day births of several great souls were talked about. Sri Sri Baba also mentioned that this embodiment of Sri Sri Nanga Baba has crossed three kalpas and was now in the fourth kalpa. (One kalpa is generally considered to be a hundred and twenty years in this age.) He also said that during the leela of Lord Sri Rama, Guru Nanak-dev was Rajarshi Janaka, the father of Devi Sita. Later I found this mentioned in the Kathamrita of Sri Bijoy Krishna Goswami Prabhu also”.

I heard this in rapt silence and my mind went into a whirl. Knowing some more of Nanga Baba’s births from Sree Sree Maa, with a smile I said, “So he has been your father multiple times?” to which Maa confirmed in a bright affirmative and said, “He is the person to whom I lodge all my complaints when I am angry with these sages, who have given me so much work to do. It is due to his wish that I have taken this birth. No one else would have been able to bring me back on earth. I somehow could not refuse him.” I remained silently grateful to Sri Sri Nanga Baba.

The role of “Sadguru” (Divine Guru) was central to the philosophy propounded by Guru Nanak. He did not look upon any second God beyond the Sadguru. A true Guru, according to him, was an embodiment of Omkar, the image of Parameshwar - veritably Bhagwan Himself. That is why, for a major portion of his life on earth, Nanak-dev would sing the glory of the true Guru. Some of them are as follows:

“Transfixed in Truth is my Lord’s Seat,
Unwavering are the steps of his Holy Feet;
He who follows the Guru’s word in deed,

Is worthy of God’s Infinite Grace indeed.”

“The palace of Lord Hari is so beautiful,
Within dwells my beloved jewel, my God;
Enlightened with pearls and diamonds,
The Golden Temple is the fort of the
Lord²;

On whose support shall you scale the fort?
Which stairs to climb, whom to beseech?
By the words of the Guru, take your steps,
Walk absorbed in Guru-Hari, you will
reach.”

“Meeting the Guru heralds joy,
Pervading bliss within,
Quenching thirst’s fire,
Ushering wealth divine”

“When Soul and Supreme merge, Light
mingles into Light
Hatred ego wash away, sorrow makes way
for Delight,
He who following Guru’s words,
enthrones Hari within,
He merges into the Guru, leaving no
difference between.”

The self-realized Truth-enunciations of Mahatma Nanak-dev echo the same eternal Truth inscribed in the great scriptures like Patanjali’s Yogdarshan, Srimad Bhagvatam and others. Throughout his life this great soul was always fully attached to the pure divine transcendental Supreme Being. That is why he is “Guru Nanak Nirankari”. To me, he was always a God-father figure. Now I know that he is indeed my God-grand-father, if I am allowed to take that privilege.

Sri Partha Pratim Chakrabarti,
Her Blessed Child

² Here the great saint subtly talks of the body as the golden temple-fort of God (Harmandir) enlightened by pearls of selfless service and diamonds of pure knowledge, which one can enter through meditation on Lord Hari following the words and path enunciated by the Guru. The wonderful Harmandir Sahib of the Golden Temple Complex, where the Guru Granth Sahib is installed, symbolizes this great Truth.