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ਮਰਣੁ ਮੁਣਸਾ ਸੂਰਿਆ ਹਕੁ ਹੈ ਜੋ ਹੋਇ ਮਰਨਿ ਪ੍ਰਵਾਣੋ

NANKANA SAHIB

In the sacred memory of those true sons of Guru Gobind Singh, who sacrificed their precious lives on 20th February, 1921 in the precincts of Gurdwara Janam Asthan Nankana Sahib to uphold its sanctity.

GURU NANAK DEV MISSION, PATIALA

35 Paise



NANKANA SAHIB

Nankana Sahib is a small town, a sub divisional headquarter of district Sheikhpura of West Punjab in Pakistan. Before partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 it formed a part of India. Situated about eighty kilometres to the West of Lahore and thirty kilometres from the river Ravi to its north, it lies in most fertile verdant plains of the Punjab.

The existence of a huge mound popularly known as Dhaular (royal palace) spread over approximately half a million squareyards at less than half a kilometre from the town of Nankana Sahib with traces of ancient habitation over there and a very old drinking water well at its foot to its north called Sitawala, with deep drawn out flight of steps built in heavy lime masonry leading to its spring level to provide cold springwater bath to the inmates of the palace, bear testimony to the antiquity of the place and its having been a territory of some Hindu king, one of whose princesses was Sita, whose name the well bears to this day. General rise of the spring-level in these areas has hidden the steps now. Another equally old well to the east of the mound, entered as Balewala in the revenue records of the place appears to have derived its name from one Bala, a contemporary of Guru Nanak.

Any further excavation of the mound to trace its past history has not been possible so far, as almost the entire mound is covered with Muslim tombs and they would consider it a sacrelege to dig up the graves.

It is believed that during pre-historic times, when Kairos and Pandvas fought the battle of Kurkushetra, one Raja Varat of Multan had set up an habitation of the name of Kotli at this place. The said mound and the wells at its foot seem to be the remnants of Kotli.

The earliest available historical reference to the place falls about the 15th century, when the Lodhi Pathans held sway over northern India. This place was then called Rai Bhoeki Talwandi and was held by one-Rai Bular of Bhatti clan, a descendant of Rae Bhoe, from whom it had derived its name. One of the tombs on the mound is alleged to be that of Rai Bular, which bears out the existence of a grave-yard over there as early as the fifteenth century,

One Kalyan Dass popularly known as Kalu lived there in Talwandi. He owned some landed property over there and also held charge of the land records of the areas under Rai Bular. On the 3rd of the moon-lit half of April 1469 Tripta, Kalu's wife, begot him a male child, who was named Nanak after his elder sister Nanki. She was so named as she had been born at the house of her Nana (grand-father on mother's side) in village Dera Chahal in Lahore district. This sister of Nanak was the first to observe some sort of divineness about her brother, that flared up all around when at the age of seven he astonished his teacher Pandit Gopal with his eloquence in explaining deeper truths about man and God and composed an acrostic on Punjabi alphabet giving divinely inspired interpretation to each letter. He always spoke and sang of one God and his love for Him and being rich in music

and melody he cast irresistible spell on all those who listened to him. It was here that at the age of nine he was called upon to put on the sacred thread according to the Hindu tradition by the family priest Hardyal, which he refused to do, saying that the thread could do him no good and would be burnt with the body on his death. If it was at all necessary to wear one, let it be spun out of the cotton of Mercy and yarn of Harmony with twist and knots of truthful and temperate living. In fact he discarded all traditional rituals and caste and creed distinctions so scrupulously observed then. His was a God inspired soul and his magnanimity made all that came into his contact magnanimous.

Rae Bhoie ki Talwandi, his birth town, came to be known as Nanak-ayan (home of Nanak) or Nankana after him and since then it has been called Nankana Sahib (Sahib being just Persian epithet of respect).

Nankana Sahib is a town of Gurdwaras (Sikh temples), the most important of these being the 'Nanak's Ayan' called Janam Asthan or Birth Place of Nanak. It was earlier known as Kalu's Kotha (Room of Kalu). Pandit Gopal's Pathshala, where Nanak had his first schooling is at present known as Gurdwara Patti Sahib and is about 150 yards to the south east of Janam Asthan, and hardly 50 yards beyond that, is Gurdwara Bal Lila, that commemorates the place where the boy-Nanak enjoyed the company of his playmates and cast on them a spell with his novel games and sweet and melodious talks. In fact they felt a strange sort of light emanating from his eyes. These three gurdwaras were originally got

constructed by one Baba Gurbakhsh Singh under orders of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, when the latter visited the place on his return from Multan after its conquest in the year 1818-19.

Besides there are three other Gurdwaras sacred to the memory of the boy Nanak. Two of these commemorate his having worked as a herdboy to his father's cows. He would usually lead his cows to the nearby pasture grounds, where they would continue grazing, while Nanak sat under some shady tree absorbed in meditation. One day the cattle strayed into a neighbouring field and feasted on the luxuriant crop there. Enraged beyond measure at his loss the owner of the farm complained to Rai Bular, the chief of the place, who sent for Kalu, and deputed a man to appraise the loss but the appraiser's report on the loss was almost negligible.

On another day our herd-boy let loose his cattle for grazing in the meadow and himself fell asleep under a shady Mal tree. With the change of shade in the afternoon the hot sun rays fell on Nanak's face. A cobra appeared on the scene and shaded Nanak's face with its hood. By chance Rai Bular was passing that way, when he saw this. On his arrival there, the cobra disappeared but to his great surprise he found the boy alive. The Mal tree under which Nanak had slept stands to this day. A Gurdwara called Mal Sahib had been constructed here to commemorate the incident. It is about one kilometre to the east of Janam Asthan, while the Gurdwara Kiara Sahib (Kiara means a field) is just at the place where the herd had damaged the crop and is situated four hundred yards farther east.

There is another Gurdwara-Tamboosahib (Tamboos means a tent) 350 yards to the east of Janam Asthan where stands a Mal tree which, with its branches, has covered, like a tent, the place beneath. It was under this tree that young Nanak took shelter when he returned from Chuharkana, whereto he had been sent by his father with some cash to make some profitable bargain. Nanak had spent the entire amount on feeding the hungry ascetics whom he had met on the way. When questioned he had replied that there could not be a more profitable bargain.

There is still another Gurdwara of Guru Hargobind, the 6th in line from Guru Nanak. This is in memory of the Guru having visited and stayed at this place while returning from the Kashmir valley, about the year 1621-22. It is situated near Tamboosahib to its east.

The whole of the present town of Nankana Sahib runs between Janam Asthan and Kiara Sahib—a total length of almost two kilometres, with a width of half a kilometre only and the main centres of its population of about ten thousand are round about Gurdwaras Janam Asthan, Bal Lila and Mal Sahib. Before the partition of India in 1947 Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were almost equally represented in the town but since partition it is entirely a Muslim town.

As Nanak grew up he did not feel at all interested in the worldly affairs. In order however to please his father, Nanak agreed to work as incharge of the provision stores of Daulat Khan Lodi of Sultanpur, where his sister Nanki lived with her husband Jai Ram. To divert his mind to

worldly pursuits, Nanak was soon married to Sulakhni, the daughter of Moolchand of Batala. Thereafter he lived a regular family life for some time at Sultanpur working all the time at the provision stores, which he lavishly distributed among the poor and needy. He used to take his early morning bath daily in the stream Vein, that flowed close by, and sit in deep meditation on its bank for hours together, after which he started his day's work. One day he did not return after his bath, nor could he be traced anywhere and it was presumed that he had been drowned. But to every body's surprise he was seen at the end of the third day emerging out of the stream with the words : 'There is no Hindu and no Muslim' on his lips, which he repeated time and again. Thereafter he started the work, for which he felt, he had been commissioned by God, and his first message to everyone was to obliterate all the distinctions between man and man. That was what he meant by his oft-repeated catch-phrase-'There is no Hindu and no Muslim'. He was now no longer an employee of the Nawab and henceforth he set out as God's minstrel always harping on His Name and calling upon everyone to sing His praises. He selected one Musalman bard-Mardana-to play on rebec with him and started on his missionary tour of India and abroad. It is said that he also had on his tour Bala a Hindu Jat (land cultivator) with him to testify his firm belief in the unity and universality of man. He had implicit faith in the unity and universality of God and man. His God is One Supreme Being, and a single word that according to him could name God was 'sat' i.e. Eternal, Truth.

He defined Him as the only one Creator, Who pervades the entire creation. Having an unparalleled existence He never entertains fear nor enmity against any one. His Being is not measured by time. He was never born and is self-radiant. Thus he did not believe in the incarnation of God nor in the existence of some Satan-like Evil Being who could measure swords with Him.

Similarly to him all human beings were one. The same Supreme Soul pervades all of them. They had similar bodies and same temperaments. Human nature was the same everywhere and at all times. Hence all differences of caste, creed, colour, size, profession, wealth, status and nationality were meaningless. In his eyes the so called lowest of the low were, as good as, rather better than the self-centred highest of the high. He however attached great importance to the development of one's inner-self—the soul within—the only criterion for that being the measure of truth and love inculcated in the soul so much so, that the same should radiate from within and diffuse all around. Whosoever came in contact with Guru Nanak and on whomsoever his benign look fell, realized some celestial light within himself and he now came to be called and addressed by them as 'Guru' Nanak. 'Guru' is usually one who dispels ignorance. The disciples or followers of Guru Nanak came to be called Sikhs, the term Sikh having the same connotation as of that word in Pali meaning a person dedicated to and journeying towards Truth. Their concept of Guru is also a little different. They believe that God's Light that radiates from the Guru's person is in fact the Guru, but it does not necessarily pervade mortal human body. God's Light is in the 'Sabad' as they call it,

and the 'Sabad' is the Divine wisdom or the Revelation recorded in the God inspired Hymns of Guru Nanak carefully preserved in the Holy Book of the Sikhs, which thus forms their unchangeable and everlasting Guru.

Donning the garb of a fakir and accompanied by Mardana and Bala, whom he called his brothers (Bhai Mardana and Bhai Bala—Bhai means brother) Guru Nanak left Sultanpur Lodhi in 1497 and set on his first missionary tour that lasted for 12 years. He first halted at Saidpur, now known as Emenabad, near Lahore. There he stayed with a poor carpenter Lalo and partook of his very humble and simple food rejecting the choicest dishes of Malik Bhago—the chief of the town. On being asked as to why he was having his meals with the low-caste carpenter and had not accepted his dainty hospitality, the Guru replied 'your food is ill-begotten and smacks of the blood, sucked of the poor, while milk oozes out of the honestly earned bread of Lalo. Humble but honest labourers are more welcome at my God's court than the high caste idle rich enjoying other's earnings'.

At Tulambha in the west Punjab he came across one Sajjan, who was an assassin in a saintly garb. 'Sajjan' is a Panjabi word for a friend. He had his eye on the Guru. The latter saw through the game and before going to sleep at night, he sang a beautiful hymn in tune with the rebec played upon by Mardana. The hymn, as incorporated in the Holy Granth at page 729, offered some wonderful, similes to Sajjan which he at once realized. It began with lines :

Bright sparkles the bronze
But when rubbed blackness comes from it.

The hymn had the desired effect and Sajjan turned a friend indeed.

At Hardwar he saw a multitude of people bathing in the Ganges and offering water to their dead ancestors by throwing it up, towards the rising sun. The Guru began throwing water in the opposite direction. When asked, he told the people, that he was irrigating his crops at his village only 200 miles away. They laughed at him but the Guru replied if their handfuls of water could reach the sun why not his water on this very earth only 200 miles off. The people thus realized the futility of their offering water and other articles to their dead.

The Guru visited many places in Bihar, Bengal, Assam and other east India states-more particularly the places of pilgrimage where he was likely to contact people from far and near and disseminated his views on God and human life. He is said to have visited Burma and gone as far as Indo-China in the east. He always took a rational view of things and disapproved all meaningless rituals and superstitions. At the temple of Jagan Nath he saw the priests invoking blessings of God by performing the Arti ceremony. It was an offer of flowers, incense and pearl like things to their idol-god on a salver, whereon were also placed some lamps kindled with ghee instead of oil. The offer was made standing and singing in chorus together with cymbles and flutes, but the Guru kept sitting while the ceremony was in progress. The priests called upon him to explain his conduct. The Guru's face gleamed in ecstasy and deep devotion as the following lines went forth from him in sweet melodious tune :

'The entire firmament is Thy salver, o Lord, and the sun and the moon are the lamps thereon, innumerable twinkling stars are the pearls and rubies set in Thy salver.

The entire sandal and other woods emanating sweet smells are the incense at Thy door. O'Lord of light, the winds whisk over Thy Royal Head and the countless flowers borne by the whole forestry lie as offerings at Thy feet. How wonderful, O'destroyer of all sufferings, is this constantly held Arti of Thine and how sweet resounds incessantly Thine Divine Music. Listening to the Guru the priests did realize that their Arti was just a mere shadow of what the Nature was holding to God every night and day.

Guru Nanak returned home after twelve long years. His parents, sister, his wife, children, Rai Bular and all others, whom he met after so long, were very happy with him. But he did not stay at Talwandi long and soon he set on his second missionary tour (1510 to 1515) on the Deccan side. This time he visited many a Budhistic and Jain temple on his way and went as far as Ceylon where he met Raja Shivnabh of Sangla-deep (Ceylon).

His third tour (1516-18) took him to the north. At Mansarovar he held discussions with Sidhs—the followers of Guru Gorakhnath—who lived on alms, in seclusion away from human habitations. Guru Nanak criticised them for their unhealthy escape from life, rather than facing its problems. The Guru read to them a hymn, the essence whereof was 'Abide-pure amidst impurities of the world'. During this sojourn the Guru is said to have crossed the Himalayas and gone as far as Tibet.

Soon after his return from the North he attired himself in a Muslim Haji's garb and left for Mecca. Unmindful of the position he lay in, at Mecca he slept with his feet towards the Kaaba. Enraged at this act of disrespect to the holy place, Jiwan, a Muslim pilgrim kicked the Guru saying 'what an infidel you are that sleep with your feet towards God'. The Guru calmly replied 'please turn my feet in the direction where God is not'. That was enough to awaken in them the sense of God's omnipresence. Thereafter they questioned the Guru as to who was better a Hindu or a Muslim and the prompt reply came 'God judges people by deeds and not by creeds'.

From Mecca Guru went to Baghdad in 1520 and in his talks with Pir Dastgir and other holies of the place he convinced them that there were not seven heavens and seven netherlands as held by Muslims, but innumerable creations. Notwithstanding wholesale condemnation of music by Muslims, he made them realize the importance of sacred music in human life. The Guru held spiritual discussions with one Behlol at Baghdad. The latter got so much enamoured of the Guru's divinity, that he sat at the place, where he had listened to the Guru for sixty long years after Guru's return from there.

The Guru returned to the Punjab in 1521 and once again went to meet Lalo at Saidpur. It was the time of Babar's invasion of India and on his way he had looted, sacked and killed thousands of people there. Some of them were arrested and made to grind for the victorious army. Guru Nanak and Mardana were among those called upon to grind corn.

Guru Nanak bewailed the woes and miseries of the down-trodden people and poured out his heart in deep anguish thus :

How strange is Thy dispensation, O Lord.
 How incomprehensible are Thy ways.
 All is death confusion now.
 But all happens as it pleases Him, O Nanak
 How can man resist His Will ?

He narrated what he saw at Saidpur in his pithy and extremely pathetic poems known as Babar-Vani occurring at page 417 of the Holy Granth. But Guru accounts for all these sufferings and ruin thus :

'When the Lord wishes to destroy one
 He first destroys one's virtues'.

Guru Nanak was now 52 and through his words and deeds he had been all the time, diffusing the celestial Light, he had been endowed with. He settled at Kartarpur on the Ravi bank. T. L. Vaswani in his book 'A prophet of the people' writes at page 69, 'Work and worship, love and labour, silence and song blended together in the life at Kartarpur.' Here for 18 years the Guru gave practical demonstration of a truthful living which according to him was higher than Truth itself. Here the people learnt with him 'how to live pure amidst the impurities of life' In good and virtuous action lay the quintessence of a religion, he said :

It is not words that saint or sinner make
 It is action alone that is written in his book of fate.'
 His practical life of meditation and service and his thorough humbleness serve as beacon light to the world.

In 1539 he chose one of his true devotees Bhai Lehna to be his successor and transmitting the light of the Guru into him, he named him Guru Angad i.e. Guru's limb or Guru's own self. A few days later he quietly passed into God's abode. There arose a controversy between the Hindus and Muslims regarding the disposal of his earthly remains. The Hindus claimed that he was their Guru, while Muslims called him their Pir and accordingly each party wanted to perform the last rites in its own way. That bears to the universality of his teachings and the love and respect they all had for him.

Guru Nanak last visited Talwandi, his birth place in 1510 when he went to see his parents there on return from his first missionary tour. Soon after that he shifted his family and his old parents to Kartar Pur—a new town founded by himself on the Ravi bank upstream, over one hundred kilometers direct rout from Talwandi. Very little is known about Talwandi for over three centuries after that, except that Guru Arjun—the fifth of the Sikh Gurus came here some time towards the close of the 16th century, when he gave location to the Kalu's Kotha, where Guru Nanak was born and other places associated with his early life over there and again when Guru Hargobind, the sixth in line, came to pay his homage to the place in 1621-22. At the time these places were mere small raised platforms or at best small huts which were kept clean and lighted at night by some devotees of the Guru. Later a class of people called Pujaries or Mahants took up the work as their regular profession utilizing the offerings made at the places for their sustenance. The next historical reference to the place is in 1818-19 when Maharaja Ranjit Singh after his conquest of

Multan came here, ordered the construction of several memorial buildings called Gurdwaras and attached to these a large landed estate of about twenty thousand acres for their maintenance and for Guru ka Langar (Guru's community kitchen). This grant of land made the job of Mahants and Pujaris more lucrative and resulted in their firm hold of these.

The sanctity and un-assuming devotion noticed here earlier turned materialistic. The Gurdwaras Janam Asthan and Mal Sahib were at this time in the hands of Udasi sect, Bal lila and Kiara Sahib with Nirmal sect and Tamboo Sahib and the Gurdwara of the 6th Guru were run by Nihangs. All of them but more particularly the Udasis had Brahmanical propensities and in time they had installed the Hindu idol gods alongwith the Holy Granth in their Gurdwaras.

With the advent of British rule in the Punjab and the running of irrigation canals in the Nankana Sahib area the agricultural incomes of the Mahants had gone very high up, and they began leading luxuriant and in some cases immoral lives, so much so, that Naraindass the Mahant of Janam Asthan had retained publically a muslim prostitute. It was also alleged that some pilgrim ladies had been mal-treated in Janam Asthan. Besides, some Mahants had sold off and even otherwise transferred the Gurdwara lands to their kith and kin.

This was the state of Gurdwara affairs all over the Punjab. The intelligentsia of the Sikhs assembling at Amritsar on the 15th November 1920 constituted a committee to consider the Gurdwara problems on the whole. They decided

to oust the Mahants and Pujaries from all the Gurdwaras and take the managements in their own hands, but the parties doing so were to remain strictly non-violent and in case of aggression from the Mahants or any other party they were to passively resist their attacks.

Accordingly a party of about 130 sikhs led by Bhai Lachhman Singh entered the Gurdwara Janam Asthan on the morning of the 20th February, 1921. The Mahant had hired some Pathans and others, who fired at and butchered the non-resisting Sikhs within the Gurdwara precincts and then collecting the dead as well as the wounded into various heaps and sprinkling kerosene oil burnt them all. The news spread like wild fire all over and another party of 2200 men led by Bhai Kartar Singh Jhabhar arrived at Nankana Sahib on the 21st afternoon. But meanwhile the Government had arrested Naraindass and cordoned Janam Asthan with a huge military force. Kartar Singh Jhabbar insisted on proceeding further, but the Commissioner of Lahore Division, on behalf of the Punjab Government handed over the possession of Janam Asthan to a committee of seven Sikhs headed by Sardar Harbans Singh a descendant of General Sham Singh of Attari. the hero of the battle of Sabroan, fought by the Sikhs against the English in 1846. Thus Janam Asthan passed into the hands of the Sikh community as a whole. The Mahants of the other five Gurdwaras at Nankana Sahib peacefully made over the control of their respective shrines to the sikh Committee, and some of them arrived at some settlement even regarding the properties held by them. But others remained adamant on that issue, till the enforcement of the Punjab Sikh Gurdwaras Act in 1926 under which a specially consti-

tuted Gurdwara Tribunal heard the claims and counter claims of the parties and barring four or five out of about 50 property cases all were decided in favour of the committee. The total area of the estate including the non-agricultural land under the town of Nankana Sahib, various habitations of the Gurdwara tenants, approach roads, irrigation channels, and the railway line, comprising 17675 acres was declared to be originally Gurdwara property, though some of it had been acquired by the Government for public purposes. The actual agricultural area that finally passed into the hands of the Sikh Committee was about 15927 acres.

In 1926 a local committee of management of the Sikh Gurdwaras at Nankana Sahib was duly constituted under section 85 of The Sikh Gurdwaras Act. It consisted of 13 members—8 elected by the Sikhs of the districts Sheikhpura Gujranwala, Lyallpur, Lahore and the town of Nankana Sahib and five nominated by the Central Sikh Committee, Shiromani Gurdwara Perbandhak Committee with its head office at Amritsar. An amendment made in the Act in 1943 placed the Central Committee in charge of these Gurdwaras retaining the Local Committee as a mere advisory body. The local Committee during its 17 years regime renovated some of the Gurdwara buildings, raised a marble memorial within the Janam Asthan compound, in honour of the Sikhs killed and burnt there in 1921. They have been included among the Sikh martyrs and their memory preserved in the daily set congregational prayer of the Sikhs. Besides, the Committee ran two high schools for boys and girls and a free hospital and dispensary at Nankana Sahib, an Arts, Science and Technical College in Bombay, a Sikh Missionary

College at Amritsar and several schools in Meerutt, Moradabad and Balandshahr districts of Utter Pradesh. Two Sikh Missions were also established and run at Hapar in U.P. and at Kangra in the Puniab. An annual fair attended by about 150 thousand people was held at Nankana Sahib in November and another a smaller one on the 20th of February in memory of the martyrs of the day.

Since the partition of India, Nankana Sahib forms a Pakistan territory and as Pakistan was committed to be entirely a Musllm country, the Sikhs had to vacate it totally leaving the very birthplace of theirs to be looked after by the Pakistan Government. Nankana Sahib could then very well be given the status similar to that of the Vetican city, but neither the British rulers of India, nor the major parties partitioning the country, that is the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, bothered about it. The Sikhs being a very small minority and that too in one state of the Punjab only had but to rely on the good faith of both their governments. They have nodoubt been mutually providing facilities to the Sikh pilgrims to visit Nankana Sahib on the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, but the Sikhs have neither the free access, nor the option to manage and look after the proper performance of the Sikh ceremonies in the Gurdwaras. It is rather reported that the shrines including the Janam Asthan remain locked for months together.

It sits heavy on the Sikh hearts that the holy places, for free access to which they had spilled their blood and lost as many as one hundred and thirty valuable lives, still lie out of their reach. It is indeed very sad that the places, wherefrom

went off every morning and evening a call of mutual love and service to mankind, should have been closed down and Sikhs not allowed free access, nor performance of customary Sikh rites there. The Sikhs though small in number, have acquired almost an Inter-national status and the formation of the Nankana Sahib Foundation comprising of the Sikh nationals of England, U.S.A., Canada, Iran, Japan and other East Asiatic and European countries with the object of securing through negotiations, this religious right of theirs to visit and to manage and run the Sikh temples in Pakistan, bears to the intensity of feeling, with which they look at the problem.

The impact of Guru Nanak's universal teachings on humanity in general, the roll of service that the Sikhs have played in the world history-more particularly in that of India, the significance of the Passive resistance displayed by them at Nankana Sahib and several other places and their status as a minor world community call for an inter-national consideration and grant of their purely religious rights to them.

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Note : No. 167 will be 'Guru Amardas' in English.

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