

# Guru Angad: Epitome of Humility and Devotion

ONKAR SINGH\*

\* Advocate & author, 181 Mount Kailash, East of Kailash, New Delhi 110 065

GURU ANGAD DEV, WHO ASCENDED the throne of Guru Nanak Dev, was formerly known as Lehna. Guru Nanak named him “Angad”, a limb of his own body. Lehna was the most devoted and humble disciple. Guru Nanak’s choice for a spiritual successor fell on Lehna and not on either of his two sons. He made him more than his successor. He made him his equal.

At a simple ceremony attended by disciples, Guru Nanak placed five copper coins and a coconut before Angad and invited him to occupy formally the seat of the Guru. Baba Buddha, a veteran Sikh, put the saffron mark on Angad’s forehead anointing him as the second Sikh Guru. Bhai Gurdas, the noted poet savant, has described the succession of Guru Angad Dev thus:

Angad had the sacred mark on his forehead  
And hallowed umbrella on his head.  
He ascended the throne of Nanak  
The Guru’s spirit entering the disciple.

Guru Angad hailed from village Khadur in Amritsar district though he was born at Sarai Nanga village in the present Faridkot district. In Khadur he was “Lehna,” the rich trader’s son, a worshipper of goddess Durga, who led pilgrims to the Jwalamukhi temple every year. One day he heard a neighbour sing hymns of Guru Nanak. He was deeply touched and yearned to meet the Guru who resided at Kartarpur. From the day he met Guru Nanak, Lehna plunged himself in the service of the Guru. His great humility and devotion won him Nanak’s heart. Guru Nanak trained him to be his successor imparting perfect spiritual insight.

Acclaimed as the worthy disciple of Guru Nanak and his chosen spiritual successor, Guru Angad inherited not only his Master’s spiritual mantle but also diligently pursued his teachings giving it a wider meaning and acceptance.

He assiduously worked within the conceptual framework of Guru Nanak’s philosophy of religion. He consolidated the new faith which grew during his nearly thirteen years of pontificate. He inculcated devotees with a respect for disciples and high ethical conduct. He urged them on to live a virtuous life, do good deeds and devote one’s life to remembering God and serving His people. God rewards the upright and holy who toil in obscurity, he said. It is the love of God, not ascetic practices, that win God’s grace:

God is not won with asceticism  
However much you may try.  
O Nanak! God is attained with love and truth,  
And true understanding of His word.

Himself an ardent devotee of Guru Nanak to whom he completely surrendered, Guru Angad fervently believed in love and service of Guru (holy teacher). He couldn’t bear separation from Him:

Nanak spring is for her  
who has her spouse at home.  
She whose Master is away  
suffers day and night.

Guru Angad was a poet of eternal truth and sensitivity. It was his devotion to Guru Nanak that he used the *nom de plume* "Nanak" in his hymns, a practice followed by the other successive Sikh Gurus. Guru Angad's hymns are incorporated in the holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture.

A simplified Gurmukhi script was his distinctive contribution on which he had worked hard. He had Guru Nanak's hymns collected in a book in the Gurmukhi script. He is also said to have written a *Janamsakhi* of Guru Nanak.

Spiritually wise and pragmatic, Guru Angad took keen interest in the physical culture of the devotees. He encouraged them to take part in outdoor sports. He paid equal attention to the proper education of children whom he loved. He wanted them to be taught in their own mother tongue, Gurmukhi.

Like his master, Guru Angad's daily routine was to rise early in the morning, go for bathing, meditate and recite Nanak's celestial hymn, *Japji*, followed by singing of holy hymns in a congregation. He maintained Guru Nanak's practice of *Guru Ka Langgar* (free community kitchen) where all, rich or poor, irrespective of caste or creed sat alongside as equals to eat together. This practice of *Langgar* was further enhanced by Mata Khivi, wife of Guru Angad.

After offering prayers, Guru Angad would tend the sick every day. He came to be known as the healer of incurable diseases. Many devotees came from far and near for the healing touch.

Legend has it that Humayun, who succeeded the Mughal king Babar but was overthrown by Sher Shah, had come to seek Guru Angad's blessings. But he had to wait as the Guru was in a congregation. Feeling slighted, Humayun is said to have reached for his sword. The Guru was unmoved though he chided Humayun: "When you should have used the sword against Sher Shah, you didn't. You fled from the battlefield like a coward. Now here you come and threaten to attack unarmed devotees engaged in prayer." Humayun wished to be pardoned, and sought the Guru's help. The Guru told him to leave the country and that he would regain the throne as foretold by Guru Nanak. Humayun went to Persia and regained the throne afterwards.

Under advice from Guru Nanak, Guru Angad shifted to Khadur after about seven years stay in Kartarpur. Khadur Sahib became the seat of the Sikh faith after Nanak.

□