

Guru Nanak's Muslim devotees

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Guru Nanak (1469-1539 A.D.) respected Islam though he was often a strong critic of social evils prevailing amongst the Muslims as well as the Hindus. He could not withstand the oppression of the ruler over the ruled or the high handedness of the high over the low. He began his career, as a teacher of men, with the significant utterance that "there was no Hindu and Musalman". He believed in the eternal unity of humanity and exhorted; "Regard all men as equal, since God's Light is contained in the heart of each". He stressed: "Where the deeds are good, there is a perfect mind too". (**Sri Rag**, M.I. 3:30).

With the coming of a new and staunchly monotheistic cult of Islam and establishment of a new political power (extraneous in origin), a stir – spiritual, social, cultural and political was created in India. Punjab, being the pedestal, had felt the impact and impress first of all and the most of all. The mental conflict, new challenges, sense of insecurity and the resultant chaos brought in new values and social problems. In this state of confusion, Nanak advised; "Call no one bad; this is the essence of knowledge" (**Asa**, M.I. **Var**). For him "that alone was good which pleaseth God" (**Jap**, M.I. 16), He defined his God as One Being; Becoming; Truth; All pervading; Creator; Without Fear; Without Hate; Enlightened; Gracious" (**Mul Mantar**, M.I.). Such a Nanak was bound to see the Hindus and the Muslims alike. He can rightly be called as the "harbinger of Hindu-Muslim unity" and the "fosterer of National Integration". The whole life of Nanak projects him as a lover of humanity – a friend of the Muslims and helper of the Hindus.

Nanak was Guru for the Hindus and a **Pir** for the Musalmans. If Triptan was his mother, **Daultan** – a Muslim lady-was his midwife (Cf: Macauliffe, M.A., **The Sikh Religion**, Vol. I.P.I., 1963 Ed.) The Family astrologer, Hardial, had declared, at his birth, that he would be worshipped by Hindus and Muslims alike and not merely by Hindus. It was a Muslim devotee and rebeck player, Mardana, who was Nanak's constant companion more than even the Hindu Bala. If Bala was his left arm, Mardana was his right. Mardana was a Muslim **doom** (bard). When Nanak was absorbed in union with God, he would play, sweetly, softly, and hypnotisingly, on his rebeck. He would remain thirsty and hungry, miss his wife and children, suffer untold privations and risks, walk miles and miles with sore and swollen feet but would not leave Nanak (Cf: Azad, Mohammad Hussain, **Qasas-e-Hind** i.e., Tales from Indian History, Vol. II, 51st Ed., Lahore). He was his part and parcel. After Nanak's settlement as a householder at Kartarpur, his life-long musician companion, Mardana, died here (or in Afghanistan?) His son, Shahzada was graciously, adopted by the Guru into his household as the successor rebeck player. It is a glowing example of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood as envisaged and practised by Nanak himself. Ever since, the Muslim rebeck-players (**Rababies**) continued to attend and play rebeck at the **Hari-Sankirtan Sammelans** in the Gurudwras and they enjoyed special reverence by all Sikhs and Hindus.

Nanak's father, Kalu Chand, was in the employment of a Muslim **Zamindar** and noble, Rai Bular – a **Bhatti** (Muslim Rajput) by caste. The latter was so kind towards the God-fearing boy, Nanak, that he always disapproved of Kalu's severe treatment of Nanak. He used to offer compensation from his own efforts if ever Nanak was found lapsing in his domestic affairs or in money and material matters. It was Rai Bular who soothed Kalu's frayed frets and torrential temper by agreeing to compensate for the loss of crops upon which Nanak's

cattle were reported to have grazed. When Nanak was once beaten black and blue by his father for having squandered away money, meant for the trade and benefit, over a group of hungry **faqirs**, Rai Bular was so much pained that he advised Kalu to restrain himself from any severity on the child (Nanak) and offered him to recompense his loss from his (Bular's) own treasury (Gian Singh, **Tarikh Guru Khalsa**, P. 23). Bular told Kalu that Nanak was a **Wali (Faqir)** and godly and that he (Bular) could recompense from his own treasury for any loss done by Nanak. On the eve of Nanak's marriage, Kalu approached Rai Bular for his formal leave. He was offered, by the latter, all sorts of aid in money and material (Santokh Singh, **Nanak Panth**, No. 17, Ch. 1, P. 91). He was advised to celebrate the marriage with all pomp and show. Rai Bular, by his own sweet will and force, handed over a lot of money to Kalu for sundry expenses. Rai Bular, though himself an orthodox Muslim, later bestowed rich jagirs and lands to the various commemorative Gurdwaras associated with the name and life of Nanak e.g. to Gurdwaras of Bal Lilla, Manji Sahib, Kayara Sahib, etc. He also constructed a tank in affectionate remembrance of the childhood of the Guru. Rai Bular helped Nanak's family in more than one way and his affection for the Child Nanak was unbounded (Cf: Macauliffe, M.A., **Sikh Religion**, Vol. I, PP. 2, 11, 18, 19).

When Nanak was appointed a **Modi** (Store-keeper) in the service of Daulat Khan, Governor of Punjab, some serious charges of embezzlement were brought forth against him. The Lodi Governor, a staunch Muslim did not punish Nanak but exonerated him after an enquiry. He was highly appreciative of Nanak and begged apology of him (Azad, **Qasis**, II, P. 196). It really goes to the credit of Nawab Daulat Khan Lodi, that he not only ignored Nanak's first refusal to obey his summons on the complaint of his **Qazi** but also allowed him to have free and unrestricted discourses and disputations (**Munazrat**) with the **Qazi** in his court. (Macauliffe, Vol. I, pp. 37-38).

Nanak maintained friendly relations with several Muslim Scholars of Religion, Sufis, Saints and nobles. In **Tarikh-e-Punjab** by Bute Shah, we can find several names of Muslim **Walīs** and religious people whom Guru Nanak visited. Nanak got his earlier schooling and elementary education in Persian from a Muslim (Cf. **Janam Sakhis**). Ghulam Hussain identifies his early tutor as Sayyid Hasan Darvesh who lived in their neighbourhood (**Siar-ul-Mutakhirin**, Vol. II p. 400, 1886 ED.). He had some declamation with his other Persian teacher-**Qazi Rukn-ud din**. Nanak had some religious association with a Muslim, named Murad, too who died in 927 A.H. at Baghdad vide a Turkish inscription on a wall in a graveyard of Baghdad. He is also stated to have reclaimed a notorious Muslim robber, Sheikh Sajjan, during his travels (Macauliffe, M.A., I. pp. 45-47). This Sajjan, after his conversion, was made by Nanak, later on, as the first high priest of his mission. It is interesting to note that the first Sikh temple, ever constructed, was on the spot where this conversion took place. Nanak also lived with Lalo – a low caste carpenter – who has been identified as a Muslim by some. He dined with him in preference to Malik Bhago's hospitality. On his return from Baghdad, Nanak had stayed, for a while, at Kalat where a Gurdwara was, later, built. The Khan of Kalat (a Muslim) himself used to visit this Gurdwaras for homage. He also donated a good jagir for this Gurdwara (called Gurdwara Baba Sahib). According to Bhai Gian Singh, there is a Nanak's house at Mecca which is in the shape of a Mosque and is labeled as 'Wali-e-Hind'. The Ionian (Syrian) State bears all the expression of a round-the clock free kitchen (**sada-brat-langar**) there. When Nanak visited Kiratpur (Kiratpur, 18 miles from Rupar), he was well received and entertained with milk by a Muslim Pir Budhan Shah. Nanak had also passed long time in the company of Sheikh Farid II (Sheikh Ibrahim) at Ajodhan (Modern Pakpattan). Both respected and loved each other and parted like dear ones. After his return to Punjab from his itinerary of U.P.,

Bihar and Assam, Nanak also visited the **Rauza** (mausoleum) at Pakpatten, of Sheikh Farid I (**Ganj-Shaker**) – a great Muslim **Sufi** of the 13th century. He had a cordial discussion with Sheikh Ibrahim (Farid II) – the custodian and **sajjada-nashin** of the **Rauza** – on the attributes of God and His devotees. After a friendly spiritual dialogue, both separated. Afterwards, Nanak had, once again, a meeting with Sheikh Ibrahim (Farid II) when the latter went to receive the former for four miles outside the skirts of Pakpatten. Again a philosophic discourse took place between the two wherein Nanak told the Sheikh that in his creed Humility was the Word, Forbearance the Virtue, and Civility the Spell which charms the heart of the Master. The Sheikh, after a long conversation to his mental relief, is said to have bowed before Nanak and asked for his blessings. At Panipat, Nanak met great Muslim **Sufi**, Shah Sharaf. They had a long discourse. Their free and frank conversation and the ultimate conversion of Shah Sharaf to Nanak's view-point testify the human relations which Nanak was having with the Muslims who were, creditably, not all inimical to the new sect even in the so-called Islamic State.

An objective and impartial student of history must give full credit to the general liberality of the Muslims also as he would like to acclaim the large-heartedness of the great Guru. The magnanimity, open mindedness and affability of the Great Muslim Saint (Shah Sharaf) is evident as he is believed to have kissed the hands of Nanak and went satisfied to his residence after his long and refreshing spiritual dialogue with the Sikh Guru. In the Kuru country (Kamrup?), Nurshahi (a Muslim?), head of the conjurers, a seductive queen of charms and an enchanting beauty, fell down at Nanak's feet and was reclaimed. At Kiria (Kari Pathan di, in Amritsar district), Nanak is said to have made many Pathan converts, just before his visit to Sayyidpur. If the account be correct, it is no small a credit for the Lodi Emperor to have permitted (or ignored?) conversions of Muslims in a Muslim State at the hands of a non-Muslim but a genuinely true saint. After Sayyidpur, Nanak went to Sialkot, via Parsur, and from there to Mithankot where he met a great Muslim Sufi Mian Mitha (Sweet one). Mian Mitha was highly proud of his religious stature. He went out to see Nanak and hoped to convert him to his own view-point. A long conversation started between the two in which Nanak explained his theory of Love, Humility and God-head. Mian Mitha was highly impressed by his words of wisdom and civility. It is said that even Khwaja Khizar – the traditional water-god-confessed Nanak's superiority in his vision to two of Nanak's followers, i.e., Sajjo and Ghebo.

During his travels in the South, Nanak met a Muslim Pir – Makhdum Baha-ud-Din Qureshi – who was very proud of his own attainments and spiritual stature. Here too, there was a free conversation between the two where after the Pir, is said to have bowed before Nanak, took advice from him and felt obliged. After his return to the Punjab, from Ceylon, Nanak started further for Kashmir. He wore leather on his feet and on his head like Muslims, twisted a rope round his body like Buddhists and had a saffron-mark on his forehead like devout Hindus. The dress went well with his cosmopolitanism. He was accompanied by a black-smith, Hassum, and a calico-printer, Sihan (both Muslims?). After his tour of Kashmir, Nanak, along with Mardana, reached Hasan Abdal. They felt thirsty but were denied sweet water of the spring-well by Wali Qandhari who even threw a big stone at them from his abode at the hill-top. The whole incident, if viewed perspectively, may reveal that Wali Qandhari did not like to misbehave with Nanak as such but was more concerned to see his miraculous powers to test his real identity as the well-known exalted Hindu **Fakir**.

Nanak had good relations not only with the Sufis and saints or the Muslim masses, but had friendly relations even with **Hakims** and **Nazims**, like Rai Bolar and Daulat Khan, etc., and Emperors, like Babur and Humayun. He is stated to have prophesied about the invasion of

India by Babur and fall of the Lodi rule. He is also stated to have blessed Babur for his rule over Hindustan and to have prayed for the main-stay of his dynastic empire in India for seven generations. The Babur, after seeing Nanak's miracle in the prison-house, had not only released him but had also begged his forgiveness. Nanak's words had a good deal of weight-age with Babur – a matter of credit for both testifying spiritual greatness of one and the magnanimous secularity of the other. On Nanak's recommendations alone, Babur released several prisoners (Cf: **Nanak Panth**, Ch. 28, pp. 65-68; **Review of Religions**, II, 1941). Nanak had the courage to advise Babur that he too would go the way of the Pathans if he too oppressed his Subjects. He spoke to him about the uselessness of riches and power and impressed upon him to shun the lust of the same. Babur had the patience to listen to the meaningful words of the great Guru, was highly impressed and promised not to commit oppression on the poor. Nanak blessed him again and left. After sometime, Babur again invited him and offered to grant anything which he might like to ask.

Sheikh Abdus Qaddus Gangohi had admonished Babur for retaining infidels (Hindus) in the Revenue Department in the Muslim State in India and had advised him to expel all Hindus from the State Services as is clear from one of Sheikh's famous **Maktub** (Letter) to him. Babur, however, ignored his admonition. It may not be wrong to presume that Babur's courage to do so might have been the result of Nanak's bit of advice to him besides some other factors too.

Nanak is certified to be a free thinker and a functionary of a Muslim in the **Encyclopaedia Britannica (Vol. 20, Sikhs)**, The movement of Nanak attempted to establish a religion combining the higher elements of Hinduism and Islam (Cf: Carpenter, Estlin, **Theism and Medieval India**, P. 489). According to **Encyclopaedia Americana**, Nanak was influenced, in his thoughts, by a Muslim Sufi, Kabir, whom he is said to have met during his journey (Vol., 24 Sikhs). Whatever the case may be, Nanak (an original thinker) appears to have been immensely impressed by teachings of Islam. Dr. Tara Chand has amply stressed on the influence of Islamic teachings on Nanak (Cf: **Influence of Islam on Indian Culture, P. 176**). According to him, Nanak accepted Mohammed as his Preceptor (P. 149).

Dr. Ishwari Prasad has supported that Nanak's teachings clearly bear the influence and impact of Islam (**History of Medieval India**, P. 587). Nanak himself has given repeated reference to Islamic thoughts of principles in his teachings and **shalokas**. There are several **shabads** in the holy **Granth** which deeply bear a Quranic or Islamic impress. Nanak's writings also contain a number of Persian or Persianised words and allusions to Islamic traditions and literature. He is stated to have written some Persian Verses and Works also which are purely sufistic in their approach. He is said to have written a **Munajat**, called **Munajat-e-Baba Nanak Shah dar Bahr-e-Taveel**, in addition to two other books on Gnostics, e.g., **Dil Talab** (in poetry) and **Ilahi Nama** (in prose).

Nanak had no taboos. He not only declared that there was no Hindu and no Musalman but he actually rose above the distinction between a Hindu and a Muslim. He was essentially a true human being, a man who had adhered to no particular mode or medium except the hymns of humanity. Being a free thinker, he bothered little about the set dogmas prevalent amongst Hindus or Muslims. He was neither a slave of rites and rituals nor cynical about customs and ceremonies. He was a rational being who chafed at orthodoxy and conservatism, whether it was amongst the Hindus or the Muslims. If he could, as per tradition, take courage to cook and take deer-meat at Kurukshetra and threw water towards the west to his fields while at Hardwar, he was equally persuasive when he slept innocently with his feet towards the **Kaaba**. For him, there was no difference between **Ram** and **Rahim**; **Krishna** and **Karim**; **Qur'an** and **Kitab** (Gita); Hindu and Musalman.

