

Bhai Nand Lal and His Devotion

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ALL PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS OF ART and literature indicate precisely the spirit in which mankind approaches the vast, limitless cosmic Spirit. Someone has aptly said "as we see so we are". All scriptures undoubtedly explore and venerate the Truth, the Supreme Being. Gita starts with 'Vetta si vedyam cha', i.e. the knower and the knowable', a Vedantic synthesis, and upon the basis of its essential idea builds another harmony of the three great means and powers, namely, Love, Knowledge and Action, through which the soul of man can directly approach and ease itself into the Eternal.

The adoration of Bhai Nand Lal sweetly opens our eyes, for he saw in Guru Gobind Singh the shining light of heaven, the beauty of the Lord:

'O! How can I bear the light,
Shed by the piercing glance of His Love,
To enable and enlighten life,
A glimpse of the Beloved is enough.

Bhai Nandlal's collection of Persian verse *Diwan-e-Goya* is a gem of many splendours in praise of God and in adoration of beloved Guru Gobind Singh.

Bhai Nandlal was born at Ghazni in Afghanistan in 1643. When he was 19 years old, his father and mother passed away and he migrated to Multan (now in Pakistan). At the age of 45, Nandlal left his job as Mir-Munshi, to wander from place to place in search of Truth and Peace.

At the age of 52 he made his way to Anandpur. Before he could accept young Guru Gobind Singh as the Guru, he quietly started living a contemplative life in a small rented house at Anandpur so that he could watch the Guru more closely and unobtrusively. He did not disclose his real name to anybody in the neighborhood but decided to surrender himself to the Guru. But one day Nandlal became restless, unable to keep himself away, and approached the Master for 'darshan'. The radiant Guru ji was sitting in a thoughtful mood amidst his holy congregation. When Nandlal saw the Master he was dazzled and wonder-struck. He forgot about himself and his secret determination. He exclaimed:

'O' the Prince of Heaven,
The Prince of divine Beauty
Pray do not bedazzle me.

I have no more strength left in me. I am allured and charmed; I sacrifice myself into the fascinated by the Glory, O Beloved."

With these words of devotion Nandlal bowed down, saying :

'Lord! my doubts are dispelled,
I know the Truth.
The doors of my heart have opened.
The lotus in me has bloomed and
I have attained peace."

Thereafter he started living at Anandpur immersed in *sewa* and *Naam Simran*.

One day Guru Gobind Singh said to Bhai Nandlal: "you have left home and renounced the world, such a renunciation is not acceptable. Go back, work for your living, serve humanity, without involving in the fleshly trap, live purely among the impurities of the world, but remain unattached, keeping God alone in the mind." Bhai Nandlal asked: "Master! whither shall I go?" The Master replied: "Go to which ever direction thy feet carry thee."

Thus it was that Nandlal reached Agra, where the Mughal Court held literary sessions. Nandlal was soon recognized as a distinguished scholar of Arabic and Persian, loyal and devoted. Emperor Aurangzeb and his ministers at Delhi were all deeply impressed with his highly academic qualities of draftsmanship and communication skills. In due course, the Emperor rewarded him with the title of Royal *Khillat* and Rs.500/- but he was not tolerated by the Muslim ulema as a rival and recipient of royal favours. The Emperor asked his son Prince Muazzam to convert Nandlal to Islam by persuasion, if possible, and by coercion, if necessary. The news leaked out to Nandlal through Ghiasuddin, a Muslim poet and admirer. Both escaped from Agra one night and fled to Anandpur, the place where all devotees could find asylum.

Guru ji received them with due regard and affection. Nandlal, in this way, enjoyed the blissful life at the Master's feet at Anandpur.

"When one loses strength, is in chains (difficulties)
And has no other resource (way out),
Saith Nanak, God is the only refuge;
He will come to one's aid,
As He answered the prayers of the mythical elephant in distress."

Bhai Nandlal now settled down to a routine of a devoted disciple, regularly attending the morning and evening congregations, enjoying the *Naamsimran*, *Sabad- Kirtan*. One day when he presented to the Master his book of verses titled '*Bandgi Nama*' (the book of meditation) Guru Gobind Singh as a mark of appreciation of his valuable devotion, suggested the title - '*Zindagi Nama*' (the book of life).

"O what am I?
Hundreds of thousands of good people,
Deeply drunk with azure wine of Thy Love,
Are standing in Thy way
For a glimpse of Thee, O Lord!
They are offering in exchange their lives,
which they hold on the palms of their hands."

Those of us who have not yet realized the power of *Naam*, the Name of all pervading Divine Spirit, are still on the waiting list of His Love.

The life and lesson from Bhai Nandlal's writings can give us light. The problem arises in the way we understand *Gurbani*. Just as a blacksmith forges tools, including the sword, to earn his livelihood by selling his technology, and the king passes on the sword to his warriors. It is the warrior who wields the sword and not the blacksmith who hammers out the sword, nor the king who honours the warrior.

The Vedas, Gita, Holy Koran, and other Scriptures give us the knowledge to perform righteous actions. But if the people do not stand upto the true spirit who is to blame?

Nanak Satgur ta milai ja man rahai hadoor (It is when mind is pre-requisite to meet the Guru. then only the True guru is met, says Nanak)

Guru says;

'The Lord's Name, saints and Guru Govind last for ever, says Nanak,
Few are they who, in this world,

Recite the Guru's Word.'

*'Satgur no sabh ko wekhda jeta jagat Sansar
dithai mukat na hovai jichar sabad na kare vichar'*

i.e. that mere sight of the true Teacher cannot guarantee salvation; initiated one understands and practices the teacher's commands faithfully.

