

# The Hallowed Himalayas: Recalling Guru Nanak's Travels

Changithaon Gurdwara

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Sikkim is the smallest state of India surrounded by Nepal, Bhutan, China, not far from the international border of Bangladesh and Gangtok is the state capital. The scenic beauty of Sikkim is legendary and it claims to be the paradise of the East. Tourists flock to see the beautiful sunrise on the world's third highest Himalayan peak, Kanchenjunga. It is an arduous landscape of peaks and valleys that rise and fall like its colourful history. The population mainly consists of Buddhists, with a smattering of Nepalis, Hindus, Muslims, and Bengalis. Gangtok is a major sub-division town of North Sikkim and is rich in biodiversity with a variety of orchards and plants.

On behalf of the Delhi Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, I set out to explore and chronicle the current status of historical Gurdwaras in Sikkim along with two other companions, a colleague, Sr. Kirpal Singh, Principal Guru Harkrishan Public School, Karol Bagh and Sr. Harjit Singh Pawar. We went upto Gurdwara Changithaon (Ghungthang) at a height of 12,000 ft, at a distance of 105 kms from Gangtok.

We started our next journey to Gurdwara Gurudangmar at the height of 18000 at a distance of 98 km from Gurdwara Changithaon. Both these historical Gurdwaras are associated with Guru Nanak Dev ji's last – the fourth *udasi*.

It is said that satguru Nanak Dev Ji started his journey from Kamarup in Assam to Yumthang valley (a hot spring) Changithaon and, finally, via Lachen, to Gurudangmar Lake, where a Sarva Dharam Gurdwara exists today. Here Guru Nanak is worshipped by the Lamas as 'Rinpoche'. From here, he proceeded to Lhasa, in Tibet, and finally to Nanaking in China.

Chungthang is sprawled besides the confluence of the Lachung Chu and Lachen Chu Rivers that become the starting points of the Tista River. It is said when Guru Nanak visited this place, he was impressed by its beauty, and thus named it 'Changithaon'. But now the Buddhist call it Chungthang. It is said that a Rakshas who dominated the area, saw Guru Nanak doing meditation and Mardana playing the Rebab. People gathered to listen to the holy sermons of Guruji. The giant couldn't tolerate it and he threw a huge stone rock on Guru Nanak but he escaped unhurt. Instead he climbed on the rock, sat on its top and continued with his meditation. Thus he avoided the giant. He yet threw another great rock at Guru Nanak but again it couldn't hurt him but got struck with the earlier rock. The giant was surprised, he personally came forward and requested Guru Nanak to disclose his identity as to who he was. Finally the Guru shooed him down with his walking stick and asked him to get lost. The impression of the footprint of Guru Nanak as well as the giant can be seen in these two huge rocks. A large rock upon which is imprinted the footprint of the Guru and the pool of water that emerges from a crevice on the rock is also considered holy. Behind the Gurdwara is a tree known as 'walking stick' of Guru Nanak, because - while leaving this place, the stick used by Guru

Ji was planted there. Now it has curled up branches much like the handle of stick. The local people begged Guru Nanak, with folded hands, and pleaded that no edible fruit can be grown in this area. The Guru randomly picked up some rice from his *pattal* and scattered it across the open field.

Since then, rice paddy thrives only at this point, in Chungthan. At present the Gurdwara is maintained by the General Road Engineering Force (GREF) constituted by the Central Government. Mostly one Granthi and a sewadar reside there for its upkeep. Earlier it was maintained by the Singh Sabha of Siliguri [N. Bengal]. On being asked how many visitors annually pay a visit to this Gurdwara, we were told some 100, mostly from Madhya Pradesh, Mumbai and a few from Delhi and Punjab. There are two Nishan Sahibs in the premises of the Gurdwara and one on the top of the great rock, but now lately some locals are trying to appropriate them even as the Sikkim administration has installed a new notice board, trying to change the landmark.

### **Guru-Dongmar Gurdwara**

Guru Dongmar is 120 kms from Chongthang and 275 kms from Gangtok, the state capital. The Gurdwara shrine is situated at a height of 17,800 ft. It has a huge lake which is regarded as sacred by local people mostly Buddhists. It looks milky in shade throughout the year.

Heavy land-slides had taken place, after some thirty years, and the roads were totally unpassable with submerged valleys, followed by torrential rains and innumerable small and large water-falls. Indeed the area can be called as a land of water falls. The blue waters of Guru Gongmar Lake are known for these healing powers, even for blessing issueless couples with children. No wonder the Lake is treated as sacred by Buddhist and Hindus alike.

It is said that when Guru Nanak visited this area the people from adjoining habitations approached him, with folded hands, and said that the Lake remains frozen throughout the year, and their herds of cattle – could not drink water. Guru Nanak is believed to have walked around the Lake in deep prayer. Now it is said, ever since, a portion of lake does not freeze even in extreme winter. At present the army men use the Lake water for cooling radiators of their heavy vehicles. The temperature goes down to –5C. There is a lack of oxygen, which leads to breathlessness, among workers.

The area is surrounded by Himalayan snow peaks and there are countless small and large water falls where water flows uninterrupted throughout the year. The signboard reads as: "*Sarva Dharma Asthan*". There, in a small room, the Holy Guru Granth Sahib is placed while the Buddhist and Hindus pray together, but with different dialects. The room is open by some army-men on duty every morning, and closed after sunset. The Lamas worship Guru Nanak as Rinpoche, or Nanak Lama.

