

The Glorious Guru Nanak lives in Gurbani Thoughts on an Anniversary

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Guru Nanak's glory keeps shining in surprising places. A few years ago, when *The Sikh Review* entered into a reciprocal exchange with Russia's *Far Eastern Review*, we learned that a Hand written copy of Guru Granth Sahib had been, for many decades, a treasured possession of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg. The manuscript, belonging to the first half of the 19th century, was found to have been copied in Central and West Asian cities of Bukhara and Astrakhan, indicating a hoary connection with Guru Nanak's imprint on their culture. The Bukhara Manuscript even showed the date as "Asuin of 1924 Bikrami Samvat" corresponding to Sept. 1857, which doubtless confirms that the early Sikhs had flourished across central Asia, during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule, and made an impact on the local cultural scene. Evidently we have not adequately realised Guru Nanak's prophetic outreach.

The Director, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology confirmed to this writer (some 40 years ago) that the Lakes at Amritsar and Rawalsar are sacred to the Mahayana Buddhists since a long time. Pilgrims from Tibet, Bhutan, Mangolia and Sikkim consider these *sarovars* holy – second only to Bodh Goya and Varanasi. Before China annexed Tibet, pilgrims from the western Region often visited only Rawalsar and Amritsar. Since Guru Nanak is the earliest protagonist of the inter-faith movement in the world, it behoves the Sikhs to re-establish these linkages. Even closer home, it appears that a strange communal exclusivity is ruling the roost. According to a Muslim friend in Lahore, the local Sikh president of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Samadhi (adjoining the Shahi Mosque) has placed a notice outside the monument grotesquely proclaiming that Muslims cannot visit the samadhi!

The widespread natural disasters in the recent past provide a sobering opportunity for leaders of all religions to ponder over Guru Nanak's message of love and compassion and the basic unity of mankind. The sea-quake-induced Tsunami of December 2004, the deadly tropical hurricanes in USA and the devastating earthquake in the mountainous South Asia on October 8, underline the need for cooperation and forbearance which Guru Nanak preached and practised. The natural disasters do not respect national or cultural boundaries. The global warming and tectonic movement in the bowels of Mother Earth know no frontiers. Indeed Guru Nanak pronounced the elements, air and water, as sacred. He celebrated Nature's bounties and, in hymns of sublime beauty, emphasized the need to balance our needs with natural resources at all times. Guru Nanak's poetical statements warn against indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources and stress the principle of sharing. Violation of God's laws brings retribution sooner or later. The conservation of wild life, fish and fowl is explicitly or subtly implied in Guru Granth Sahib, without spelling out the biblical doomsday scenarios.

References abound in Guru Nanak's *Bani* that reflect contemporary events, but are of universal implication, unbound by chronology. To illustrate: Guru Nanak's poignant verses about the Mughal, Zahir-ud-Din Babar's invasion of northern India in 1526 could be true of the invasion and brutality of war in Iraq. This is in sharp contrast to some of the biblical pronouncements that have not stood the test of time, such as the story of creation in Genesis. However the Catholic Church has come a long way since the 15th century persecution of Galileo for flouting the prevailing version of earth's creation. Scholars of

comparative religion have yet to grasp the inspired accuracy of Guru Nanak's hymns on cosmology.

But blind faith can go to extraordinary lengths. When the Jewish troops occupied Jerusalem in the summer of 1967, devout Christians celebrated the event as a sign of the 'second coming of Jesus'. In a similar show of misplaced faith, evangelical sections in the West suggest that the October 8 earthquake in South Asia is a 'punishment for Islamic extremism' that sprouted in Afghanistan during Taliban regime and flourished in northwest Pakistan for more than a decade. Intimations of the Apocalypse remain a popular preoccupation. Nevertheless, the hymnal references in Guru Nanak Bani to creation and cosmogony are in the nature of a preface to the moral and spiritual message spread across a thousand and more pages of Guru Granth Sahib. The Sikh Theology sets store by unity and interdependence of God's creation; it dwells on equality, deplores colour or caste discrimination, preaches harmony and advocates discourse to overcome differences and promote tolerance. Only a peaceable and harmonious society can engage in spiritual development, centred on God's unity and grace. Spontaneous praise and adoration of the Divine Spirit is the highest purpose of human existence, made possible through introspection and selfrealisation. Our soul is indeed the infinitesimal part of the Divine – like a drop in the ocean.

Study of Gurbani is not an intellectual exercise but an experience that is meant to illuminate and enrich our spirit. It impacts on consciousness and destroys the opaque web of superstition. Indeed God's Name is the best path to liberation, wherein a feeling of profound peace and contentment comes flooding in, fulfilling the Guru's promise:

ਹਰਖ ਅਨੰਤ ਸੋਗ ਨਹੀ ਬੀਆ ॥

ਸੋ ਘਰੁ ਗੁਰਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਉ ਦੀਆ ॥ [SGGS: 186]

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