

# **‘Mard-e-Kamil’ – Baba Nanak**

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WHAT DID HE DO TO AWAKEN the human race? How shall one describe him?  
Allama Iqbal, in his Bang-e-Dara, sings:

“iPr auTI Awikr sdw qohld kl pMjwb sy  
ihMd ko iek mrdy kwiml ny jgwieAw ^vwb sy” (iekbwl)

Less than two millennia after the Buddha, a clarion call to the unity of God and equality of man was again heard from the north with a fresh resonance.

Born in 1469 during the decadent rule of the Lodhi dynasty, it was an ‘axial era’ in human history. It was an age of uncertainty, insecurity and crass corruption. Social conditions were very much akin to those prevalent at the birth of Jesus Christ, or in Arabia where Prophet Muhammad appeared on the scene. Socio-religious practices were reduced to mere rituals, occultism and priestcraft. Contemporaneously, in Europe, similar chaotic conditions prevailed spurring the twin phenomena of the Renaissance and the Reformation. Martin Luther and John Calvin were up in arms against the evil practices which had crept into the Catholic Church.

Guru Nanak aptly characterized the sad state of affairs thus:

The age is like knife  
The kings are butchers  
Justice hath taken wings and flown  
In the dark night of falsehood  
The Truth is nowhere visible

(Rag Majh)

The Lodhi kings, bigoted and power-bloated, wallowed in carnal pleasures:

The Master says:

The Kings have turned man-eaters  
Their officials act like dogs  
They lick blood and eat the flesh of the people.

(Rag Malhar)

Guru Nanak, who called himself a ‘*shae*’ (poet), composed about a thousand hymns under 18 different ragas or melodies out of the 31 used in the Granth Sahib. He chef-d’ oeuvre is the Japji, the morning prayer recited by the devout, which alone is not set to any musical measure. Japji is the quintessence of his philosophy and forms the credo of the Sikh faith. As to when and where it was composed, there is among the scholars a divergence of views. According to one school of thought this was revealed to him when he dived and mysteriously disappeared into the rivulet; another school opines that it was the work of his mature years when after this peregrinations he had finally settled down on his farm. According to apostle-poet Bhai Gurdas:

*Phir Baba aya Kartarpur, bhek udasi sagal utara  
Pehr sansari kapre, maji beth kiya avtara*

However, the Japji shows him at the apogee of his powers and his climactic vision of the ultimate. The Master was at the zenith of his spiritual wisdom. The entire work consists of 38 cantos comprising some 2000 words. The first nine words, from ikonkar to gur prasad, constitute the seed mantra of the Sikh doctrine. It lays the foundation of his uncompromising monotheism. The *mul mantra* is given at the beginning of each raga in the Granth Sahib and it precedes all Sikh prayers. The great poet Iqbal says: the Japji is to the Guru Granth what *Sura fateha* is to the Holy Quran. Just as the *Sura fateha* – “Bismillah-hir-Rehma nir-Rahim” – figures at the start of each chapter of the Holy Quran, so does the mul mantra embellish the chapters of the Granth Sahib.

*Japuji* is a serious work of metaphysical profundity, metaphorical richness and aesthetic charm. The style is terse but syncretic. Never has a spiritual teacher put more depth into so concise a composition. In the Socratic style of posing a fundamental query, the Master enunciates the problem at the very outset:

How then shall the Truth be known?  
How shall the veil of false illusion torn?

And himself gently but firmly provides the solution:

O Nanak, thus runneth the writ divine  
Abide – by His Will and make it thine.

In the words of Professor Puran Singh, Guru Nanak’s ‘one song marks him as a creator whose genius puts its seal on the ages’. Here he assumes his divine personality in all its glory. In its melodies we meet the Master. ‘Nad’, ‘Ved’, bliss commingle in its sounds. Millions recite this poem in the ambrosial hours and derive sustenance and strength. ‘Guru Nanak is Japji, and Japji Guru Nanak’, said the poet-saint Bhai Vir Singh. Its appeal for salvation of Man is timeless. Seeds of Huxley’s perennial philosophy of the universal religion are scattered here.

There is many a stanza of sheer beauty. However, who present here only a glimpse of canto 27 which is perhaps the longest in the *Japuji*. His vision encompasses and encapsulates the entire Cosmos. There is a natural flow, rhyme, rhythm and inspread flashes of mystical tremendum. One is elevated to a higher mansion. To wit:

### **SODAR – Té Deûm**

ਸੋ ਦਰੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਕੇਹਾ ਸੋ ਘਰੁ ਕੇਹਾ ਜਿਤੁ ਬਹਿ ਸਰਬ ਸਮਾਲੇ ॥

[SGGS: 8]

Where is the gate, where the mansion,  
From whence Thou watchest all creation,  
Where sounds of musical melodies,  
Of instruments playing, minstrel singing,  
Are joined in divine harmony?  
In various measures celestial musicians sing of Thee.

There the breezes blow, the waters run and fires burn ...  
The regions of the earth, the heavens and the universe  
That thou didst make and dost sustain  
Sing of Thee and praise Thy Name

Only those Thous lovest and have Thy Grace,  
Can give Thee praise and in Thy love be steeped.

Not only was he a poet divine, but also a great lover of Nature. In the closing years of his life, he wrote an Ode to the seasons: the Baramaha Tukhari – the cycle of 12 months. Rag Tukhari, a ragini of the complete raga, is twenty-second in the seriatim of ragas in the Granth Sahib. This raga is said to have come from Tukhar. Generously drawing upon similes from the flora and fauna of countryside, the Master depicts his deep affinity for mother Nature. The poem is marked by an ethereal beauty and an infinite charm. The verses couching the pangs of separation and sorrow and the soul's yearning for union with the Beloved touch the sublime. The poet's passionate lyricism suffuses the theme.

The readers may well know that there is another Baramaha in rag Majh in the Adi Granth composed by the fifth Sikh Guru. It is precisely this Baramaha which devout Sikhs recite at the start of the Indian calendar month and call this practice: 'maheena parna'. How is that Guru Nanak's Baramaha, which literary critics rate so high, is not recited in the same way? Here are a couple of fragments from this lyric:

### **Chet (March – April) – The Spring time**

ਚੇਤੁ ਬਸੰਤੁ ਭਲਾ ਭਵਰ ਸੁਹਾਵੜੇ ॥

[SGGS: 1107]

In the month of Chet  
It is spring. All is seemly  
The beauteous bumble – bees  
In the flower bedecked woodlands,  
The home of my childhood days.

But there is sorrow of separation in my soul,  
Longingly I wait for the Lord;  
If the husband comes not home, how can a wife  
Find peace of mind?

The sorrow of separation wastes away my body,  
The koel calls in the mango groves,  
His notes are full of joy,  
But there is sorrow in my soul.  
The honey-bee hovers about the blossoming bougs,  
A messenger of love and hope.  
But O Mother of mine, it is like death to me.  
For there is sorrow in my soul,  
How shall I banish sorrow and find blessed peace?

### **Bhadon (August – September): The Fall**

ਭਾਦਉ ਭਰਮਿ ਭੁਲੀ ਭਰਿ ਜੋਬਨਿ ਪਛੁਤਾਣੀ ॥

[SGGS: 1108]

Lost in the maze of falsehood,  
I waste my wanton youth,  
River and land are one expanse of water  
For it is the monsoon, the season of merry-making,

It rains.  
The nights are dark.  
The wife knows no peace.  
Frogs croak,  
Peacocks cry with joy,  
The papiha calls ... peeoo, peeoo  
The fangs of serpents that crawl,  
The stings of mosquitoes that fly  
Are full of venom.

The seas have burst their bounds in the ecstasy  
Of fulfillment.  
I alone am bereft of joy  
Without the love of the Beloved Lord.

(Translations: UNESCO/Khushwant Singh & others)

Little wonder that his prophetic vision and timeless message through the medium  
of his divine poetry continue to beckon the seekers of truth.

*Baba Nanak Shah Fakeer  
Hindu ka Guru, Musalman ka Peer.*

