

Guru Nanak's Travels in Bihar: A Historical Perspective

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GURU NANAK TRAVELED PROBABLY OVER forty thousand miles for some two decades crossing far off lands in order to enlighten all humanity and to deliver to the people a message of love, peace and devotion to one God. Guru Nanak is believed to have entered Bihar during his first Udasi (Journey) to the East in the year 1506. His visit to Bihar is simply a small portion of the great travel and Sikh chronicles do not appear to have given much details about this portion of the travel of the Guru. It has been rightly said "where ever Guru Nanak went his followers erected memorials at those places. However, during the past five centuries there have been currents and cross currents affecting the footprints of the Guru". At the same time, with large number of Sikh families having settled in different areas of Bihar, after partition of the country, some of such memorials have been so developed as to become places of pilgrimage necessitating this write up in a fresh perspective.

Tracing the Footsteps:

Guru Nanak entered Bihar from what is now Uttar Pradesh. There is difference of opinion among scholars about the route adopted by Guru Nanak, while proceeding from Benaras to Bihar. In the "Atlas-Travels of Guru Nanak", Drs. Fauja Singh - Kripal Singh have referred to two routes from Benaras to HajipurPatna; "one kacha route lays along the bank of Ganges and the second proceeded there via Gaya". According to these learned writers, Guru Nanak wanted to visit Gaya on the way to Patna because Gaya was an old - famous center of pilgrimage of Hindus and the Buddhists, and as such they have opined that Guru Nanak took the Gaya route (Map-9). Dr. Trilochan Singh (Guru Nanak - A Biography) is also of the same opinion when he writes, 'From Benaras Guru Nanak wended his way to Gaya'. Referring to this difference of opinion, Dr. Ved Prakash in "The Sikhs in Bihar" (Thesis submitted by him for his doctorate and later on published by Janki Prakashan, Patna") - writes, "According to some Guru Nanak first came to Patna and then proceeded to Gaya, associated with the name lord Buddha. This view seems to be unconvincing because the Guru could not prefer first visiting Patna before Gaya due to the fact that Gaya was and even today is the famous place of pilgrimage of the Hindus and there he was sure to get a good opportunity of imparting his mission to the common folk who so often frequented such religious places".

"However, Surinder Singh Kohli (Travels of Guru Nanak) writes that Guru Nanak touched the territory of Bihar following the course of the Ganges and entered Bihar at Buxur (The old Siddh Ashram), then passing through Arrah and Chhapra, he reached Patna. Bhai Saheb Bhai Vir Singh (Guru Nanak Chamatkar) also mentions the visit of Guru Nanak from Patna to Gaya-Bodh Gaya and to Rajauli.

Harihar Kshetra Mela:

Surinder Singh Kohli further says that Guru Nanak attended the fair at Harihar Kshetra about three miles from Patna on the northern bank of Ganges, where he attracted the people by his sermons of life. The fair is now called Sonepur Mela. According to Muzaffarpur Gazetteer (1958) "The famous Sonepur fair in Saran district beyond Hajipur was previously held at Hajipur and only oblations were offered to deity at Sonepur." A three day Prachar Camp is organized at Sonepur by the Prabandhak Committee Takht Sri Harimandir Ji, Patna Saheb every year at Kartik Purnima. Again, according to said Gazetteer, Hajipur subdivision was founded in the year 1865 and was comprised of Six Thanas - including Lalganj. It is said that sermons of Guru Nanak were so impressive and appealing that a number of Sangats were established in the area of Hajipur and Lalganj, which by now are non-existent. Lalganj (now in the district of Vaishali) has the distinction of having a century old rich library - Shri Sharda Sadan Pustkalaya.

Gurdwara Gai Ghat:

From Hajipur, Guru Nanak came to the house of one Jaita Seth situated at a place called Bishambherpur (Janam Sakhis) near Pachhmi Darwaja of then walled city of Patna with a number of gates, on the southern bank of Ganges, within the jurisdiction of present Alamganj Police Station. Surinder Singh Kohli has referred to this place as Pachhmi Darwaja Sangat where Guru Nanak stayed for sometime. Bhai Jaita was much pleased to meet Guru Nanak and prayed for his salvation. The Guru told him that he would do so when he revisits this place in his ninth jama. The place was obviously used to be managed by Mahants, Baba Mangal Singh being the last Mahant, appointed as such by Baba Mukand Singh Mahant of Sri Harimandir Ji, Patna (1913 - 1930). Balbir Singh Sethi tells us that it was at the instance of his grand father Baba Mukand Singh that a Bir of Guru Granth Saheb was taken in a decorated Palki from Sri Harimandir Ji, and installed at this Gurudwara. After the death of Baba Mangal Singh, his sons Didar Singh and Ranjit Singh transferred this shrine in favour of Prabandhak Committee in the year 1972.

Salas Rai of Patna:

It was probably at Bhai Jaita's place that Mardana, companion of Guru Nanak wanted to know something about the importance of human life, often sermoned by Guru Nanak, but the Guru kept quiet. Later on, when Mardana complained of hunger, Guru Nanak took out a gem from the earth, handed over to Mardana to sell it in the market and to take care of his hunger.

The shopkeepers approached by Mardana offered meagre consideration for the gem which Mardana did not accept and came back. Guru Nanak then asked Mardana to go to Jauhri Tola of the city to sell the gem to Salas Rai. Salas Rai examined the gem and told Mardana that the gem was so precious that he could not afford to purchase it but he paid Mardana Rs. 100/- as *Mehmani* (for having a look at it) Mardana brought the amount and the gem before the Guru. According to Bhai Saheb Bhai Santokh Singh (Suraj Prakash-Jeewan Dus Guru Saheban Translation in verse) Guru Nanak told Mardana that human life is like a precious jewel, those who appreciate its real value recognize it and re-emerge with Eternal Reality while others simply waste their life in gratification of sensual pleasures. Guru Nanak asked Mardana to return the money, which Salasrai declined to accept back. Alongwith his servant named Adharaka, Salas Rai came to see the Guru. Guru Nanak's effective

preaching produced such an impression on Salas Rai that he became Guru's disciple and brought Guru Nanak to his house where the Guru stayed for about eight months (according to some scholars the period of stay is more than that) Bhai Saheb Bhai Vir Singh in *Guru Nanak Chamatkar* narrates a lengthy discourse between Guru Nanak and Salas Tai, who converted his house (Haveli) as Guru Nanak Dharamshala- the first of its kind. It is said that Guru Nanak put his Turban on the head of Salas Rai and appointed him as a Preacher of the area with the condition that after Salas Rai's death his servant Adharaka, who had acquired spiritual enlightenment, shall become his successor. At the time of his departure, Guru Nanak professed that a *Mahanpurkh* (great person) shall take birth at this place.

Twice Blessed Patliputra:

The Haveli of Salas Rai, where Guru Nanak stayed became a centre of preaching. On his way to Assam, Guru Tegh Bahadur stayed with his family first at Bhai Jaita's place and later on the family was shifted to Salas Rai's Haveli, in compliance with a Hukumnama* issued by Guru Tegh Bahadur. It was in this Haveli that Guru Gobind Singh was born. The *Janamasthan* of Guru Gobind Singh is now known as Takht Sri Harimandir Ji, Patna Saheb. In one of his Hukumnamas Guru Tegh Bahadur bestowed Patna with the title of *Guru Ka Ghar*. The old single storeyed *Janamasthan* has now come up to a majestic five storeyed Gurudwara building with three big langar halls, about three hundred residential rooms for the pilgrims, constructed from time to time with the efforts and under the supervision of Sant Nishchal Singh Ji of Yamuna Nagar, Sant Kartar Singh Ji of Sultanpur and Baba Harbans Singh Ji Karsewa Wale. A separate V .I.P. complex with thirty six modern rooms known as Salas Rai Jauhri Niwas is reminiscent of the services rendered by the enlightened Jauhri to Guru Nanak and the people of his faith.

The history of development that took place at this august shrine of Sikhs during the past fifty years calls for a detailed study beyond the purview of this write-up.

Suffice it to say that the seeds of human love, peace and devotion to God sown by Guru Nanak in Salas Rai Haveli have now grown into a flower of religionpolitical center of Eastern India in the form of a Takht (seat of authority) to preserve and promote Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh doctrine of UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD through the offices of a fifteen-member Prabandhak Committee to be approved by the District Judge of Patna, in exercise of powers vested in him under the Religious Endowment Act, 1863.

Destination - Bodh Gaya:

Guru Nanak then visited Bodh Gaya - famous place of pilgrimage for Hindus as well as Buddhists. Most of the pilgrims come to Gaya to light the earthen lamp or perform other shrads (Hindu rites) for the salvation of their ancestors. According to Surinder Singh Kohli, when Guru Nanak was asked by the Pandits to perform the ceremony of Pitris, the Guru told them that his earthen lamp was the Name of the Lord and admonished them for such fruitless practices and advised them to follow the path of remembrance of the name of the Lord. The Pandits realised the truth of what Guru Nanak had said and sought his blessings. The place sanctified by the visit of Guru Nanak is situated at Deoghat, near Bishnupad Mandir on the bank of Falgu Nadi. In the central hall of the building, a Hindi version of Granth Saheb* has been

placed on a raised platform along with Gita and Ramayana. A statuette of Baba Sri Chand, son of Guru Nanak has also been installed in the room. The last Mahant Baba Satnam Das having died in early 2006, after prolonged suffering, his father Vaid Anant Das, who used to look after his son, is now managing the shrine and claims it to be an Udasi Sangat, which historically is not correct. There is strong resentment among the local Sikhs.

Having stayed at Gaya for some days Guru Nanak paid his next visit to Bodh Gaya where Lord Buddha attained enlightenment. Guru Nanak sat outside the memorial, in spiritual bliss, with Mardana at the Rabab, and the Kirtan attracted Mahant Devgir. In his discourse with Mahant Devgir, Guru Nanak sermonized that a person has to exercise control over his wishes so that wicked intentions should melt away and shady thoughts and passions should surrender to Divine Sublime. Mahant Devgir was much impressed by the doctrines enunciated by the Guru and adopted the discipline ordained by Guru Nanak. According to Bhai Saheb Bhai Vir Singh and other scholars, Mahant Devgir was said to be a very respectable and wealthy person. The third successor of this Mahant was one Bhagatgir who was afterwards rechristened as Bhagat Bhawan.*

The Sangat at Rajauli:

Going from Bodh Gaya to Rajgir, Guru Nanak passed through Rajauli, where a faqir, Kalhan Shah had been meditating for long by the side of a "Dhuni." Impressed by the melodious voice of Kirtan of Guru Nanak, the faqir came and bowed before the Guru who blessed him with real Name. According to '*Guru Nanak Chamatkar*' two memorials were created at Rajauli; one in the memory of the faqir and the other of Guru Nanak. According to one scholar "the antiquity of the Sangat was established, but there is no reference to Guru Nanak, nor was there any evidence available, oral or documentary, to support the traditional account given by the Punjabi authors." Mahant Ramratanbux Das** is presently managing the Sangat, who claims to be the seventh successor of Mahant Nankbux Das. This Sangat is in fact the biggest of the Sangats in Bihar associated with the name of Guru Nanak and is situated in Rajauli town on Patna Ranchi main Road (NH-30) in an area of about four acres; covered by the building of the Sangat and the Bagicha attached to the Sangat. There are over fifty residential rooms in this two hundred years old building and the design of the inner side of the rooms reminds one of the design of the rooms around parikrama of Sri Darbar Sahib Amritsar. In the Puja room of the Sangat is kept hundred year old hand written Bir of Sri Guru Granth Saheb and a few pictures of Hindu deities. There are certain Samadhs within the complex; the name of Baba Sadbux Das is written in Gurumukhi on one of the Samadhs. A gate within the complex also mentions the name of Baba Gopalbux Das written in Gurumukhi. According to Mahant Ramratanbux Das, there is another branch of the Sangat situated at Akbarpur about fifteen kms. away from Rajauli on the said Patna Ranchi Road. The Khankah of Faqir Kalhan Shah is situated at some distance from the Sangat. It is neatly kept and according to one Azhar Alam, is being managed by the Sunni Waqf Board through its local committee. The Faqir was said to have possessed miraculous powers. The Dhuni is no longer burning today.

Nanak Kund in Nalanda, Rajgriha

The absence of any mention of Nanak Kund or the visit of Guru Nanak at Rajgir, in the original Biographies of the Guru (Janam Sakhis) has created doubts in the mind of some scholars about the veracity of traditional account of this historic place. On his way from Rajauli to Bhagalpur, Guru Nanak stayed at Rajgir, the old Rajgraha, said to be one of the oldest cities of India and had been the capital of Jarasandh. It is considered sacred because it had long association with Lord Buddha and Lord Mahavira. According to Surinder Singh Kohli, the place is famous in the history of Buddhism because five hundred Buddhist monks met here to fix the Buddhist canon.

Guru Nanak is believed to have a discourse with Buddhist and Jain monks and impressed upon the importance of devotion to God without renunciation: like a lotus. The city was surrounded by springs of hot water and cool drinking water was not available to the people. On the pointing out of the Guru, people dug a place and cool water gushed out. The historical spring is known as Nanak Kund. Patna Gazetteer (1991) page 101 refers to Sikh Gurudwara at the Kund. Kund is recorded in revenue records at Khata No. 332 and Khatauni No. 7690 of Mauza - Rajgir, District - Patna (now district Nalanda). During the last forty years, mainly with the untiring efforts of Bhai Ajaib Singh, the Gurudwara has been maintained and developed. Another complex of about ten residential rooms has also been constructed with the funds provided by the Prabandhak Committee, the transporters and the Sangat of Gaya. Rajgir is fast developing as a socio-cultural center and Rajgir Mahotsav is organized every year. A large number of Sikh families from Mumbai and other parts of the country, which visit Patna for celebrating birthday of Guru Gobind Singh every year congregate at Rajgir Gurudwara the next day. Here a special Diwan is held which is participated by local people also.

Monger-Bhagalpur:

On his way to Bhagalpur, Guru Nanak stayed at Monger, old Mudagagir. There is a gurdwara at the site where the Guru stayed. Dr. Ved Prakash and Surinder Singh Kohli make mention of Guru Nanak's visit to Baidyanathdham in the district of Deoghar. At Bhagalpur Guru Nanak stayed at a place in a corner of the city where a memorial was erected near Booranath Mandir in the area known as Jogsar. The memorial is being managed by Lachhmi Devi, widow of Sant Saran Das. Her daughter and son-in-law are also residing with her. An old hand-written Bir of Guru Granth Saheb is also installed in the house. Sr. Tirlochan Singh, Secretary Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Bhagalpur led us to Chhoti Sangat situated in Mathra Das Ghosh lane in Jogsar, sanctified by the visit of Guru Tegh Bahadur. The two storeyed Gurdwara is being neatly kept and managed by local Sikhs, with Bhai Jaspal Singh as Granthi. A Sikh officer of N.C.C. lives with his family in the upper floor of the Gurdwara.

On way of Bengal

By all available evidence, Guru Nanak, passing through Sahebganj and Pakur, went to Malda in Bengal. Memorials have been constructed at Sahebganj and Pakur.



- Hukumnama issued by Guru Tegh Bahadur from Monghyr containing the following instructions kabila humne patne mein chhora hai koi haweli hove bari tismein kabila harama rakhna asi pare raje ka sath gaye hain”

- A Birh of Guru Granth Saheb used to be installed in this Gurdwara. On enquiry, Vaid Anant Das stated that the said Granth Saheb has been taken away by some Sikhs from Punjab, but he could not give any positive particulars.
- Says Dr. Ved. Prakash (Sikhs in Bihar) "as a convert is usually more zealous and firm in his faith, he (Bhagat Bhagwan) did utmost to carry out the instructions of his initiator. He was converted to Sikhism during the pontification of Guru Har Rai, the seventh Guru and is credited with having established 360 maths in Bihar or Magadh.
- To trace the history of development of this Sangat and the line of succession through which Mahant Ramratanbux Das has come to be the Gadinashin of this Sangat is a matter of separate research beyond the ambit of this write-up.