

# Let us not 'Idolize' Babas: An Appeal

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I RECENTLY VISITED NANAKSAR IN PUNJAB - founded by Baba Nand Singh - on many occasions to participate in various *Samagams*. In 1957 I was posted as D.P.R.O. in Ferozepur and there I have seen that *Langar* (Free community Kitchen) is being served to all, by *Sewadaars* from Nanaksar, at the Railway Station and that arouses a curiosity to know about the detailed activities of this renowned religious centre. In my first visit to Nanaksar, I was accompanied by Sardar Gurnam Singh Teer and then again I got an opportunity to visit this place from time to time with Giani Zail Singh. His personal secretary, Sardar Harbans Singh Sahni was a great admirer of Baba Nand Singh, and he used to visit Nanaksar every month to attend a special session *Diwaan* for *Puranmasi* – full moon night. On many occasions he also took me to attend the *Diwaans* and on each occasion we were honoured -by three different Babas- with Robe of Honour (*Siropa*). Every day thousands of devotees visit Nanaksar to pay their homage and the gathering on big *Samagams* is much bigger than normal days. The Followers of Baba Nand Singh Ji, popularly known as *Nanaksari*, have spread all over the world and have built marvellous *gurdwaras*. Several of their branches have been opened and each of them is in the race to excel in their act of *Sewa*.

I have studied the detailed life of Baba Nand Singh Ji and am quite impressed with his simplicity and humility. As a *Gursikh* he had huge respect for Sri Guru Granth Sahib and always sat at a lower place than where the Guru Granth Sahib Ji was placed. He set up a perfect example of a true *Gursikh* and never presented himself except as a truly humble *Gursikh* of *Gurughar*, rather he completely dedicated his entire life to the holy mission of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

The objective of writing this article is to make a humble appeal to the followers of Baba Nand Singh Ji. The 28<sup>th</sup> October 2008 edition of the *Ajit*, published a report on 138<sup>th</sup> Birthday Samagam of Baba Nand Singh held at his village Sherpur Kalan. As per the report published, a huge *Nagar Kirtan* (religious procession), in which thousands of followers of Baba Nand Singh Ji participated, was taken out to mark the day. **It was also seen that a large framed photograph – resembling an idol of Baba ji, was placed in a golden palanquin, and the devotees scattered flower petals on it from all sides.** Baba Ji was a true *gursikh* and had full faith in the concept and teachings of Shabd Guru. It is a pity that what Baba Nand Singh Ji has practiced and preached throughout his life and now his followers are adopting *anti-gurmat* practices and moving on to a completely opposite direction. According to Sikh tradition all religious processions (*Nagar Kirtan*) are being taken out with Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji in the lead in a palanquin followed by the Sikh Sangat. Baba ji who had devoted his entire life to disseminate the lofty teachings of Shabad Guru and was against idol worship, therefore, how can his followers now justify the worshipping of Baba Ji's picture or idols in their religious centre popularly known as *Thaath*.

We all know that, in Islam, nothing is above the holy Qur'an. No one can display the picture of the founder of Islam religion, Hazrat Mohammad. Sikhism likewise rejects idolatry. Then what has gone wrong with us that we have started worshipping pictures (even idols) of Saints and Babas.

If we study the glorious Sikh history we shall find great personalities, like Baba Budha Ji, Bhai Gurdas Ji, Bhai Mani Singh and many others who not only spent their entire life following the *Gurmat* principles but set up rare examples of discipline and dedication by their outstanding contribution and blood curdling sacrifices. The Sikhs have immense respect for these great personalities. We accord honour to Bhai Gurdas Ji by singing his *Vaars* (epic poetry) with much reverence - in all *Gurdwaras*, including Sri Darbar Sahib. However, has anybody ever seen their pictures (or the idol) of these stalwarts being worshiped?

**My object is not to hurt anyone's sentiments, but to make a humble request to the followers of Baba Nand Singh Ji's Dera that they must seriously review their practices, and follow the *gurmat* in its purist form.** Likewise we all know that Bhai Ram Singh Ji was a pious person who made great sacrifices, even as he made an in-depth study Sri Guru Granth Sahib. But, unfortunately, his admirers have started a separate Sect, adopting quaint practices - within the orbit of Sikhism. It is a pity that - led by personality cult - Radha Soamis, Naamdharis and Nirankaris have made their own self styled sects. Let this not happen with another strong pillar of the *Gurmat* teaching centre, that is Baba Nand Singh Ji.

It is high time that the Sikh Scholars - and Jathedars – sat together to ponder over this divisive trend to find out an amicable solution within the framework of the *Gurmat* tradition. I have simply presented my point of view with a concern for *Panthic* unity and hope that something positive will come out, provided we take an honest initiative on this issue.

