

In troubled times a spiritual man was born

Followers of the Sikh religion celebrated the birthday of the founder of their faith the weekend of Nov. 1 and 2. Although no one day of the week is to be treated as a Sabbath Day, Sikh religious gatherings are usually held on the weekend to allow more people to take part. Everyday is a Holy Day and God is to be kept foremost in your mind in everything you do, at school, work or play.

I have taken the information for this article from a pamphlet titled "Guru Nanak" by Surendra Kumar Bajpai.

Guru Nanak is revered as an incarnation of God who came when he was needed most, by millions of suppressed and neglected people and left behind a religion. At the time of Nanaks birth reglious teachers like Pundits and Mullahs had become masters of religion and were making profits at the cost of poor and innocent people.

None dared question their authority. The masses were ignorant, they fell easy victim to the religious leaders who exploited their ignorance. Real virtues like truth and honesty were nowhere to be seen.

Social conditions at the time of Guru Nanaks birth were worse. There was little education; ignorance and poverty in the society; corruption was at its peak. On the political side, it was a most difficult time for Hindus. The rulers of India being Muslims were very cruel to Hindus. There was no law or order in the state.

Into these pitiable times Nanak was born. The word Guru means teacher and India was in need of a good teacher. He was born in the year 1469 A.D. in the small village of Talwand, which was later known as Nankana Sahib after his name and became a place of pilgrimage for Sikhs.

He was on extraordinary child who never ceased to amaze his teachers. Born of a well to do Brahman family he studied under both Hindu and Muslim teachers. He married at the age of 18 years and fathered two sons, thus he showed to the world that a person can be a family man and at the same time become a spiritualist.

One day after receiving a call from God he left his job, gave all he had to the poor and began his missionary travels around India preaching that there is no Hindu or Musalman and all are equal in the eyes of God. He started his sermons by attacking superstitions and the distinctions between caste and greed.

After visiting many places in Punjab he expanded on his travels so that millions of people could join the religious renaissance that has taken its roots in Punjab. His mission was to bring equality and fraternity among Hindus and Muslims. He travelled to Nepal and Tibet and went as far as Mount Kailash where only Yogis could go for Meditation. He also travelled to Mecca where he visited Kaba, a black stone in Mecca worshipped by Muslims. He was tired and lay down in the moskut to sleep. He lay with his feet towards the Kaba. This angered the Hajjis. They kicked him and said, 'who are you?' Are yo so ignorant as to put your feet toward God? The Guru asked them to show him a direction which does not point towards God.

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By the time he had a number of deciples and the number of people joining his mission was ever increasing. He felt the need of a place which could serve as his missionary centre. One of his diciples had given him a piece of land on which he founded a new town he named Kartarpur.

He settled at Kartarpur, worked on his farm and composed many devotional hymns including his famous Japji, 'Before time itself

there was the truth, when time began its course, he was the truth even now he is the truth and ever more shall truth prevail. He taught that there was only one God, but he was free from the bondage of birth and death. He taught God is above Vishnu and Shiva and he was the creator of characters like Rama, Krishna and Budha.

Manak deplored idol worship. He declared that God alone was to be worshipped. His spirit was to be

felt in every place and at all times. He is not to be degraded by making images of him. This concept of only one God was the basis of Nanaks teachings.

Nanak regarded ignorance as the greatest sin and superstition as a grave offense.

He believed that good actions lead man to come nearer the truth. This means the only way to salvation lies through devotion to God combined with good actions. All other works like feeding the Brahman's, gifts of cows etc. are not the ways to salvation. He exhorted his followers to simply do their duty, speaking the truth, help the poor and love God.

Service is the basic principle of Sikhism. God is best worshipped through selfless service of humanity. Without realizing God in the heart all the knowledge of the world is useless.

Guru Nanak was the greatest follower of the truth. He did what

he said and said what he did. He taught, you alone are religious who look upon all men as equal. He himself worked on his farm at Kartarpur even in his old age, and utilized all the yield of that farm in

helping and feeding the poor.

Just before his death in 1529, having completed his worldly tasks, he gave all his responsibilities of a Guru to Lakna Ji who was later known as Guru Angad.