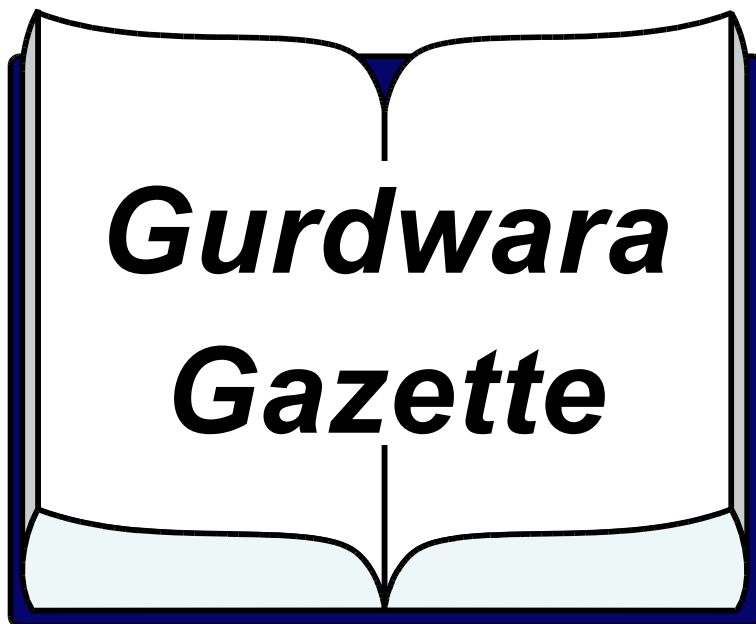


English Section



Editor : Manjit Singh

Associate Editor : Harbhajan Singh 'Vakta'

DAYS COMMEMORATING HISTORICAL EVENTS
(16th February to 15th March)

16 February	The British Government announced formation of a committee to draft an act for the management of Gurdwara. (16-2-1921)
17 February	The Sikhs took over control of the shrines at Mukatsar. (17-2-1923)
18 February	Battle of Guler, Bhai Lehna (brother of Bhai Mani Singh), Bhai Sangat Rai ji with his son Bhai Hanumant ji and others embraced martyrdom. (18-2-1696)
20 February	More than 150 Sikhs killed at Gurdwara Sri Nankana Sahib by MohantNarainu and his hired men. The martyrs included Bhai LachhmanSingh ji Dharowali, Bhai Dalip Singh ji, Bhai Waryam Singh etc. (20-2-1921)
21 February	(a) Government handed over the control of Shri Nankana Sahib to Sikhs. (21-2-1921)
	(b) The police forces did firing on Shaheedi Jatha. More than 100 killed and about 200 got injured. (21-2-1924)
	(c) Canadian Shaheedi Jatha offered arrest at Jaito. (21-2-1925)
25 February	Birth of Sahibzada Baba Fateh Singh Ji. (25-2-1699)
27 February	The Indian British Government hanged six Babbar Akalis in Lahore Jail. (27-2-1926)
3 March	Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib immersed with divine light. (3-3-1644)
5 March	Establishment of Khalsa College at Amritsar. (5-3-1892)
6 March	188 Sikh prisoners released from Jodhpur jail. (6-3-1989)
9 March	(a) Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji reached to Dumeli (Kapurthla). (9-3-1638)
	(b) Anglo Sikh Treaty. (9-3-1846)
10 March	Dewan Lakhpat Rai, a Mughal General ordered the murder of more then one thousand Sikhs, Bhai Subeg Singh ji and Bhai Shahbaz Singh ji were executed on wheels. (10-3-1746)
11 March	The Sikh army hoisted Sikh flag at the Red Fort in Delhi under the command of S. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Baba Baghel

	Singh and S. Jassa Singh Ramgarhia.	(11-3-1783)
12 March	S. Udham Singh killed Michael O'Dwayar, the former governor of the Punjab (who was an accused of Jallianwala Bagh Massacre on 13-4-1919) at London.	(12-3-1940)
14 March	Martyrdom of Akali Baba Phula Singh.	(14-3-1822)

Appeal

The devotees are requested to bring the 'PAVAN BIRS' of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Old ones for SANSKAR) to Sri Guru Granth Sahib Bhawan, Gurdwara Ramsar Sahib complex near Gurdwara Shaheed Ganj Baba Deep Singh Ji 'Shaheed' Sri Amritsar Sahib only instead of Sri Akal Takhat Sahib. This has been decided to facilitate the 'SANGAT' for the Holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Newly published) are available at the same venue.

-Guru Panth Da Das-

***Secretary,
Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee,
Sri Amritsar Sahib***

In continuation with the last edition:

Asht Ratnas- Eight Eminent Sikhs

-S. Surjit Singh 'Gandhi'

We are taking pleasure while publishing these contents from the book '*History of the Sikh Gurus*' by *S. Surjit Singh Gandhi* former Head of Sikh History Research Board (SGPC).

Bhai Gurdas Ji

A brilliant scholar, a great poet, a devoted Sikh, a zealous missionary, a great organiser and a great visionary, Bhai Gurdas ji was born in 1551 A.D. He was the son of Sri Guru Amar Das ji's brother, Tej Bhan ji. His mother's name was Jiwani ji. He was thus the first cousin of Bibi Bhani ji who was the daughter of Sri Guru Amar Das ji, wife of Sri Guru Ram Das ji and mother of Sri Guru Arjan Dev ji. His parents belonged to basarke but later on they migrated to Goindwal, the headquarter of Sri Guru Amar Das ji. Since his childhood, Bhai Gurdas ji had fascination for Sikh Sangat. According to Hari Ram Gupta, "he possessed a sweet and melodious voice and enthusiastically participated in singing hymns. He developed great love and affection for the Guru's teachings. He picked up Gurmukhi and learnt by heart Gurbani or the Guru's hymns, prayers and chants. He seldom missed any divine service".

Not much is known as to how and wherefrom he received his education but one thing is certain that he was well-versed in Panjabi, Sanskriti, Brij languages and in the science of music. He was a keen observer, extremely sensitive, high perceptive, wide awake and broad-minded.

His stance and psych bore the stamp of the Gurus and there is no wonder that he was ever ready to do anything for the Guru. He being an erudite scholar was entrusted the duty of writing the Granth at Guru ji's dictation. Sri Guru Arjan Dev ji selected a beautiful site around two kilometer to the east of the holy tank in the grove of Beri (Zizphus Jujuha) trees on the bank of a Sarovar, called Ramsar. There he sat on a cot inside and Bhai Gurdas ji outside. Everyday the Guru gave dictation

and Bhai Gurdas ji went on writing without a pause or murmur. The Adi Granth Sahib was written in the modified Gurmukhi script.¹ Guru Sahib included the hymns of Bhagats in Adi Granth Sahib.

In 1605 Emperor Akbar on a visit to Lahore stayed at Batala. Prithi Chand managed to complain to the Emperor to the effect that Sri Guru Arjan Dev ji in Adi Granth had denounced both Hinduism and Islam. The Emperor called for the Granth Sahib. Sri Guru Arjan Dev ji sent it under the custody of Bhai Gurdas ji and Baba Budha ji. Akbar asked Bhai Gurdas ji to read at a certain place. Bhai Gurdas ji at once complied but the Emperor found nothing offensive to Muslim susceptibilities. Then Akbar asked his clerk, Munshi Sarb Dayal who knew Gurmukhi to read the sacred Granth Sahib from another place. Now it was read as under:

Koi bole ram ram koi khuda (Some call Him ram ram, other Khuda)

The Emperor was pleased as the readings echoed his feelings. This being so, he made an offering of 51 gold mohars to the Granth Sahib and awarded robes of honour to its two bearers with another Khilat for the Guru.

Bhai Gurdas ji suffered from extreme mental agony when Guru Arjan Dev ji was executed. He was present in the congress of the important Sikhs held at the instance of the Guru on the eve of his departure to Lahore in response to the summons of Jahangir. He listened to the parting message of the Guru. After the execution of the fifth Guru ji and during the years when Guru Hargobind Sahib was in prison in Gwalior, the affairs of the Sikh community were left in the hands of trusted followers, among whom were Baba Budha ji and Bhai Gurdas ji. On the release of Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib from the prison of Gwalior Bhai Gurdas ji was sent on a mission to purchase horses from Kabul. Before he could complete the deal, his money was stolen and the crest-fallen Bhai Gurdas ji being unable to face his master fled to Benaras. He was apprehended and brought to Amritsar. Guru Sahib forgave him and he again resumed his duties as the chief organiser of the Sikh community.

Bhai Gurdas ji will ever be remembered for his composition, know as vars in which he explained main tenets of Sikhism apart from giving general informaton regarding men and matters. He wrote 39 vars (ballads in heroic metre in Panjabi). Kabits (couplet) in Brij, are written by a Sindhi poet of Shikarpur of the same name. In the copies of Bhai Gurdas ji's vars which are current to-day, there is the 40th var written by Sindhi poet of Shikarpur of the same name. The Sindhi Gurdas ji lived in the time of Banda. These compositions contain several references to persons and events which are of great importance to the historians of today. There are 85 passages

in 39 vars which deserve attention viz. var 1 pauri 17-48, var 11, var 21 pauri 13-31, var 24 pauri 1-25, var 3 pauri 12, var 20 pauri 1 and var 38 pauri 20. It is really surprising that Bhai Gurdas ji did not say anything about the compilation of Adi Granth Sahib and the execution of Sri Guru Arjan Dev ji. In the list of important disciples of Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji, he made notable omissions of Rai Bular and various others who were the devout disciples of Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji. The reference to the execution of the fifth Guru is indirect and vague. Bhai Gurdas ji says:-

"The Guru bath taken his abode in the river among the fish,
As moths that see the flame fall upon it and merge their light with His light,
As deer hear the sound of a distant drum and run to it without a care of doom,
As butterflies seattle on the lotus and die on it during the night,
The Guru ji's teachings we forget not and like the monsoon birds are ever
calling
The good have peace, the nectar of love and the company of the gentle.
Thus is my life a sacrifice to Guru Arjan.²

Bhai Gurdas ji's compositions are a key to the understanding of Sikh doctrines, Sikh organisation, Sikh cosmology, Sikh metaphysics and Sikh Theology. He dwelt on the disciple preceptor relationship and the spirit that the Guru ji were. He heralded to the world, perhaps for the first time, in unambiguous terms that the Sikh religion was not only the need of the hour but enshrined in itself hope for future generations. His compositions provide perspective which enable a reader to grasp the true import of the theme. He presented the Gurus as God incarnates, benefactors, redeemers, prophets, the spirit. He regarded Sangat, a school for spiritualization of individuals, soul culturalization, socialization of the individuals. Moreover, he spelt very methodically the process of regenerating the degenerate man. He also viewed Sikh religion as Universal Brotherhood. Bhai Gurdas ji remained celebrate and died in 1631.³

References:

1. When Guru Arjan Dev ji planned the compilation of Adi Granth Sahib, he asked Bhai Gurdas ji to simplify Gurmukhi script. Refer to Sikhan di Bhagat Mala by Bhai Mani Singh.
2. Translation by Khushwant Singh.
3. Gurbilas Patshahi 6 gives sambat 1686, A.D. 1629 as the date of death of Bhai Gurdas ji. Sant Sampuran Singh assigned 1630 A.D. as his death. These dates can not be accepted because Bhai Gurdas ji was alive during these years. Jiwan Baba Budha ji and Kahan Singh, in Mahan Kosh give 1694 BK (1637 A.D.) as the date of death but during this year Guru Hargobind Sahib was at Kartarpur while Bhai Gurdas ji passed away before Guru ji went to kartarpur. So the probable last year of Bhai Gurdas ji is A.D. 1631



KEDLI CHATTI AND DUMRI (JHARKHAND) TWO MORE PEARLS IN THE STRING OF SIKHISM

*-Jagmohan Singh Gill**

Sikhism is a passion and experiencing it at different places takes one to different levels of consciousness. I had this experience in some villages of Chatra District of Jharkhand many years ago. Chatra is around fifty kilometers from Gaya, the second most important town of Bihar. The main aim of those tours was to bring awareness among Sikhs from all walks of life in the distant places and to know about the richness and diversity in Sikhism. The result was almost magical. It is such mystical experiences that give one enjoyment by keeping a trail of the Sikh brotherhood. I try to convert these experiences into meaningful, sustainable and documented facts.

Getting down at Gaya railway station, we crossed Bodh Gaya and the airport. Then crossing the intersection of NH1 and NH99, known as Dobi More, and moving towards Ranchi and Gumla, we entered the district of Chatra from Gosaidih More. This area was a part of Hazaribagh district earlier. The semi-jungle area starts as one passes the monsoon-swept lush green fields. Small and big houses lie parallel to Gaya's sacred river Falgu, also called the Nilajan River. Passing through the lush terraced fields, watching people engaged in different activities and lot more, we reached the small town and Block headquarters, Hunterganj.

From Hunterganj, where our friend and Secretary of Kedli Gurdwara Sahib, Sardar Gian Singh, was waiting to receive us, we turned left and crossed the Nilajan over the newly-built bridge. People of Kedli were separated from the rest of the world before the bridge came up. Even ten years back people used to cross the river by walking during the dry seasons. It becomes risky when the water level rises during the monsoon. It used to be an ordeal for them. They would change wet clothes after crossing the river and would wrap their belongings in plastic bags and earthen pots beforehand. It was very tough for the old, the children and the womenfolk to cross the river which is highly unpredictable in the monsoon. These hardships they faced for centuries. Plenty of such examples can be seen in Bihar. Now the bridge has come as a boon to entire population settled in different villages

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across the river. About six kilometer from the bridge, this road leads to a renowned place of pilgrimage named Kauleshwari Mandir, which is equally hallowed for the Hindus, the Jains and the Buddhists. It is situated on the top of mountain with a small lake. The Christians also visit the place. A very renowned fair is organized every year in the Kauleshwari area. Large number of people from nearby districts come here to pay respect to their respective faiths over the ages.

After crossing the river we entered a big village, free from the hustle bustle. It is named Kedli Chatti or Kedli Kalan. Chatti means rural market or 'Mandi'. As one enters this village one has a feeling of being in a rural settlement in Punjab. There was something evocative about this quiet and small place. The entire atmosphere seems to be amazingly Sikh-oriented. The shops in the market are run by Sikhs. The houses, both pucca, semi pucca and owned by Sikhs in different rows display Khanda and Ik- Onkar , (auspicious religious symbols of Sikhs) in front of their homes. The men, womenfolk and children were busy in their chores, most of them with visible Sikh identities. We stopped in front of the gate of Gurdwara Sahib named Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Kedli, where some prominent Sikhs were eagerly waiting to receive us. This atmosphere of purity radiated our inner selves. We started discussions on various issues pertaining to the Sikhs. The challenges and the future course of action for the benefit of the Sikh brotherhood were also discussed. I promised on behalf of Sikh Mission, Poorvi Bharat S.G.P.C., to organize a Gurmat camp which was one of the aims of our visit besides knowing about them properly for a research on their roots, insights of past history and demography.

REASON OF SETTLEMENT AND THEIR ROOTS

Numerous ridges and spurs jut into the southern portion of Gaya region from the Chhotanagpur plateau though the major portion is the plain land and has extreme climate. This area is intersected by numerous rivers and their tributaries and the soil is fertile. Agriculture, however, depends mainly on irrigation. The crops are rice, gram wheat, sesame, linseed, marua, maize, barley, khesari, masuri (lentil), peas, urad, arahar, mung, bajra, jawar, sugarcane, potatoes, etc. In a vast area opium-yielding poppy seed is also grown. The Hazaribagh district is the chief trading centre of mineral products of Chhotanagpur area. It is noted for mica, quartz and felspar, forming the bulk of the legmatite and other mineral products. These items are traded through Kolkata. The produces of the hills and the forests are available in local hats (weekly mandi) at very cheap prices. In these hats seti-mustard seed, ganja, myrobalans (haritaki or harad), honey, wax, mohua flower, oils and seeds of resin,

cotton etc are sold in large quantities. The Santhal, and other local tribes, sell these goods at very cheap prices and huge profits are made by traders and middlemen. This place thus developed into a trading centre with traders from various places having settled here.

The Sikhs settled in Kedli and Dumri trace their roots to Sasaram, Ghazipur, Benaras and neighbouring places like Sikuhi, Bhanash, Patanwa, Chorwadi and some others connected by the Ganga and its tributaries like the Karmanasa and other rivers. Earlier, the Sikhs belonged to Agrahari community engaged in trading business. Sikhism was embraced by the people of this community out of love, gratitude and respect for our great Guru Sahib and it started from the visit of the founder-Sri Guru Nanak Sahib Ji to this area who preached the great message of equality, universality and love for fellow human beings. A part of this community became Sikh from the time of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur ji's journey towards East India. The missionaries like Chacha Fagu Mal who stayed in Sasaram for a very long time till the coming of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur ji here dedicated his pious life in the propagation of the Gurus' teaching. Udassi 'pracharaks' did a commendable job in spreading the message of Sikhism among the masses of East India. They familiarized these Sikhs with the scripture of the living Guru 'Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji'. After Sri Guru Gobind Singh ji's transforming Sikhs to Khalsa most of the Agrahari Sikhs became Khalsa. Giving details of the Agrahari community in the book 'Hindu Caste and Tribe' (1896 AD), J.N. Bhattacharya has said that Agrahari community was settled in areas around Benaras. The Agraharis of Sasaram were affiliated to Sikhism. Sasaram thus is a place of importance for Sikhism. Many Hindu castes like Sonar, Kesari, Kushwaha, Kesarwani, Thatera and others also participate in Sikh activities in Sasaram. This impact of Sikhism is seen wherever these Sikhs are spread including the villages of Kedli Chatti, Dumri and Hunterganj in Chatra district.

Around two hundred years ago Agrahari Sikhs used to come to the forest area of Kedli and its surroundings from Eastern Uttar Pradesh. They came for trading and procuring Tilhan (various agricultural edible oilseeds), Jalhan (the residual forest wood used for household cooking to industrial and commercial purposes) and Mahua (used for brewing). Slowly, yet perceptibly, Sikhs settled here. The other main reason of their preference for this place was the presence of Udassi Deras in Kedli and nearby places indicating the importance of Sikhism at Gaya for centuries. In the early days, many Sikhs did not suffix the word 'Singh' to their names. From some

land records it seems that they used Shaw. Tengar Shaw is one example from the records. They settled earlier in Kolua Daha village and controlled the local market of Kedli. Later on, they shifted to Kedli Chatti permanently. They are socially well-knit, clean and simple people. Here I gathered important information that around fifty percent of Agrahari Sikhs settled in Kolkata are connected to this area. Settlements of Sikhs can be known from the names found in land records of 1906 and 1911. Some prominent early Sikhs were S. Ramdeo Singh, S.Harparshad Singh, S.Dineshwar Singh, S. Gobind Singh S.Mishri Singh, S.Budhu Singh, S.Dhanpat Singh, S.Gopi Singh, S.Gurusahai Singh, S.Ganesh Singh and others.

SIKHISM OF THIS AREA AND PLACE OF WORSHIP

The Udassi Dera, which was called Purani Sangat was the main place of worship. Three to four bighas of agricultural land was in name of this Dera which spread the message of the Guru under the headship of Mahant Ram Das Giri. Now there is no Mahant and is no more Dera at the place. Instead, a Shiv mandir stands there. Sangat of Kedli shifted Sri Guru Granth Sahib from the Dera to a makeshift Gurdwara sahib in a small kutchra room around sixty five years ago. A copy of Sri Guru Granth Sahib was handwritten in Samvat 1880, corresponding to 1824 A.D., which makes it historical. Famous pracharakas who had made an impact on these Sikhs were Nihang Narain Singh, Sant Raghuvir Singh Kankhal, Darvesh Hari Ji and Baba Ram Singh Jharuwale to Jathedar Kewal Singh (ex-Jathedar of Takht Sri Damdama Sahib). The land for the Gurdwara was donated by S. Shiv Singh. Nihang Narain Singh helped the Sikhs to building Gurdwara Sahib. Sant Raghuvir Singh Kankhal, a revered pracharak of Nirmala order used to perform Akhand Path Sahib even in the shops of these Sikhs before the Gurdwara was built. Famous parcharak Baba Ram Singh Jharuwale's disciple S.Piara Singh came at Kedli and inspired Sikhs to dig a well. On 26th April every year Baba Ram Singh's death anniversary programme is organized as a holy remembrance. Now a spacious Gurdwara Sahib has been built. Some other local Sikhs who donated land for the Gurdwara complex were S. Kartick Singh, S.Preman Singh, S. Shivratan Singh son of late S. Gurcharan Singh of Kolkata, Dr Lal Singh (U.S.A.) son of Lt S. Gurcharan Singh, S. Lakhu Singh, S. Lakhi Narain Singh son of S.Jagdish Singh, S.Bhola Singh son of Lt S.Bikau Singh all belonging to Kolkata. The various rooms, Darbar Hall, Langar Hall, Sri Guru Granth Sahib's Palki and other essential constructions of the Gurdwara Sahib were built up by many local Sangat with the help of the Sangat of Kolkata, Dhanbad, Gorakhpur, Sasaram, Katihar, Dumri and even abroad.

Earlier, Sikhs used to celebrate Sri Guru Gobind Singh's Chatti. This was the normal tradition which is generally practised to celebrate the sixth day from birth when a male child is born. But now birthday of Sri Guru Gobind Singh ji is celebrated with a huge Nagar Kirtan a day before the Gurpurab. This is organized a few days after the celebration of Guru ji's birthday in Patna Sahib as per convenience. Sikhs residing in other parts and having links with this area come here to participate in this great religious event every year. Renowned kirtanias, kathawachaks, parcharaks including prominent Sikh personalities from Punjab, Patna Sahib and other parts come here on invitation from the Gurdwara committee. The Sikhs of this area had spread over to many places. About half of the Agrahari Sikh population of Kolkata hail from Kedli area. Nanak Panthis and local Sikh families like those of S. Bharat Singh and S. Bajrangi Singh of Tekari (Gaya), who originally are local carpenters and are now important members of Sikh community take part in Gurpurab celebration. Member of Parliament Sardar Inder Singh Namdhari helped to develop this village by having roads built and providing other infrastructure including some structures in the Gurdwara premises. An eminent personality and leader of Jharkhand area, he is widely respected in political and social circles.

The other Sikh settlement is village Dumri, about two kilometres from Huntergunj on National Highway towards Gumla. This road is also connected to Ranchi, Latehar and other places. More than fifty families live in this area. These are branches of three families who had initially settled here about one hundred fifty years ago. Their ancestors came from Uttar Pradesh and then moved to Kedli Chatti. From Kedli Chatti they moved and settled at Dumri, owning large farm lands on the both sides of the State Highway. Now they own many shops and are engaged in transport business. Many of them are high Government officials. Initially three families settled here. One of the ancestors was Sardar Balli Singh. His sons settled in Kedli Kalan and Dumri Kalan, had their roots in Uttar Pradesh. There is a Gurdwara Sahib, named Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Dumri Kalan. The land of Gurdwara Sahib was donated by local Sikhs collectively. They organize Baishakhi every year in a big way. Sikhs from surrounding areas come here to take part in this function. At present S. Balwant Singh, S.Kishor Singh, S.Dalip Singh and others are active in promoting Sikhism.

Some families have settled at Hunterganj, the Block headquarters. It gained in importance after Independence. Many families have settled here due to its connectivity with Gaya, Chatra, Hazaribagh and the capital city of Ranchi.

LINKS OF THIS REGION WITH GURUS AND UDASI PRACHARAKS OF SIKHISM

The villages of Kedli Chatti and Dumri are quite close to Gaya. This is a very important town for the Hindus and the Buddhists. Gaya bears witness to the legacy of more than two thousand years of history of our country's great religious traditions set up by famous philosophers. Gautama Buddha attained the eternal knowledge and divine wisdom here and that place is known as Bodh Gaya. People from all over the world come to pay respect to Gautama Buddha. In the heart of Gaya town and on the bank of river Phalgu Vishnupad or foot marks of lord Vishnu, is one of the holiest places for the Hindus. The pilgrims from all over India come here to pay obeisance to him. The Hindus believe that if one performed the Sradh of one's dead ancestors here the soul would be liberated. Hindus from all over assemble here during the months of September and October every year to participate in an annual fair called Pitripaksha Mela. Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji visited this place while coming from Benaras on way to Patna after preaching among people to light a lamp of knowledge of the Divine Name to achieve true liberation. Later on, the Ninth Master Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur ji, visited this place. After a month-long stay at Allahabad, Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur ji moved on to Benaras, Sasaram, Gaya and then Patna just before the rainy season in 1666. There is a Gurdwara Sahib which was earlier controlled by the Udassis, known as Gurdwara Deo Ghat or NanakShahi to commemorate the famous visit of both the Gurus to this place. The building of this shrine was built by a very prominent Udasi Pracharak, Baba Almast. He was the head preacher of one of the main Dhuans established by Baba Gurdita ji, the eldest son of the Sixth Master Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji, successor of Baba Sri Chand ji, the founder of the Udassi order. Some early and renowned Khatri settlers helped it to function and a trust was created for this purpose. Sikhs across the globe including our supreme bodies should look into this matter with the seriousness it deserves. For the Sikhs this place is very important historically because, after Takht Sri Harmandir Ji, Patna Sahib, about a hundred kilometers from Gaya, is the next most sacred place of Sikhism. This fact is mentioned in most of the early researches made by historians. Now it is in a very dilapidated condition with no maintenance and even without any caretaker.

As we travel through this region we find numerous Udassi Deras even in the most remote parts. These were sponsored by rich people of early centuries who believed in Sikhism or had deep respect for the Gurus. They had attached huge properties with such Deras so that they could function properly and meet the costs

of day-to-day requirements. Gaya and its surroundings were most important. The Udasis preached the message of Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji and recited the bani of the Gurus, but they retained their separate identity. The famous Bhagat Bhagwan was conferred blessings, called bakhshishes, by the Seventh Master Sri Guru Har Rai ji. This Udassi saint is remembered with high esteem in the Sikh tradition and history. His family name was Bhagwan Gir. It is said that he was born in a Brahmin family at Bodh Gaya and became a sannyasi at an early age. In search of peace, he heard about the great teachings of Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji and visited Sri Guru Har Rai ji the living successor of Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji at Kiratpur Sahib. Sri Guru Har Rai ji blessed him as a Sikh and renamed him as Bhagat Bhagwan. Here Guru ji enjoined upon him to propagate Sikhism which he did in East India and set up Udasi Deras or monasteries at several places. His disciples and successors spread Sikhism in entire Bihar and even crossed the boundaries to go up to Sind. About three hundred sixty such important Deras came into existence in this Magadha region from where Sikhism spread further towards the eastern parts of our country. There is a very big Udassi Dera at the centre of Gaya at Kirani Ghat known as 'Sri Panchayati Akhara Bada Udassin Sangat' controlled by four Mahants of sub groups affiliated to Udassin Panchayati Bada Akhara, having headquarters at Keetganj in Allahabad . The road is named after this Dera and is called 'Panchayati Akhara Road'. Huge property has been given in endowment with the Dera along this road and the area is known as Roshan Tal. Here, according to Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, Akhara means 'band of the Udassi or Nirmala sects in particular going out as religious preachers'. Bands of these Sikh Sadhus often faced difficulty in finding residence and food during fairs at the pilgrimage centres. Mahant Pritam Das Nirban took the initiative and persuaded some very rich Sikhs of those days including Nanak Chand (uncle of Diwan Chandu Lal, one of the senior ministers of the Nizam of Hyderabad). He donated Rs 7 Lac for the formation of Panchayati Akhara. Given that five maunds of rice would cost just a rupee at that time, one can imagine how large this amount was. With this money Panchayati Central Akhara was set up in Prayag, Allahabad in 1779 AD with branches at several other pilgrimage centres like Hardwar, Gaya, Puri and many other places. Here we met one of the Mahants named Saraswati Das who was one of the successors of Mahant Sarup Das (from Haldaur near Hardwar) who used to teach Gurmukhi to junior Mahants. Other early Mahants were Haridas ji, Kishan Das ji and Sunder Das ji .Maintenances of the Dera and expenses of Mahants come from rent and other sources. Many families of the Nanak Shah Panthis are having links with this Dera and visit it on different occasions.

OCCUPATION

Kedli market was a very important 'mandi' in the olden days. It was well connected with Lohardanga, Daltonganj, Gumla, Chandwa, Balumaath, Gaya, Sherghati, Jhumri Tilaya, Kodarma and farther to Kolkata, Ranchi, Patna and other places. Goods like rice, ghee, wheat, lac, gond, wood and other things were sent to and items like maize, mahua, thread, cloth, salt and other products were brought from these places. More than 150 years ago, S. Bholu Singh and some others were the main traders and controlled this market. Mahants of Udasi Dera of Gaya were also involved, in business and appointed 'gomastas' (managers) and 'mustaddis' (accountants) for trading activities locally. The Sikhs had a zamindari of nearby twelve villages. This was seen in Kolua Daha village of Kobna panchayat area where they had 1200 acres of land. The locals always respected their words of commitment. They were rich Shaws (businessmen). They lost most of the lands after Independence owing to the land ceiling laws and other financial and personal reasons. Even today, while visiting different places along with them, we can feel their importance in the local society. They used to carry goods on the back of bullocks and donkeys to different markets. The goods were kept in a big cloth wrapped like a bag and hanging equally from both sides of the animal. This mode of transport was locally known as 'Ladani'. They dominated and regulated the local market. At present various types of trades are operated by these Sikhs. They are involved in wholesale as well as retail trade of various items ranging from grains, ghee and other sundry goods. Shops of medicine, grocery, electronics, stationery, readymade garments, various types of wholesale clothes, ghee etc. are owned by these Sikhs. Farmlands in the surrounding areas of different villages are still owned by them and various crops are grown there. This shows the impact of the Sikhs on the local social milieu for centuries from the day of their settlement in this area. They have held high their Sikh identity ever since.

BROTHERHOOD IN LOCAL AREA


In this area Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims have enjoyed brotherhood over generations. They share social roots and common dietary practices. This abiding friendship and inter dependent relationship is very strong. Kesaris also partake in Sikh activities. Most of the Sikhs speak in the Maaghi dialect, as this area was an integral part of Magadha Desh from the ancient times. Now many of them speak Khari Boli. Presently the Mukhia of Kedli Kalan village is a Sikh lady, named Manorma Devi, wife of S. Naresh Singh. Earlier S. Dineshwar Singh was the village headman. The Sarpanch of Dumri village is S. Samsher Singh. The Sikhs now

wear the traditional dresses like any other Sikhs residing elsewhere. Earlier male members wore 'kurta' and 'dhoti' with 'pugri' on the head as a symbol of being Sikhs and women mostly wore 'saree' as per local culture. Now their identity is prominent from the manner they dress up. While men wear colourful 'pugree', 'kurta' and 'pyjama' alongside shirts and trousers, the womenfolk wear typical Punjabi style 'salwar-kurta' to modern dresses, according to the occasion and individual tastes. They eat food just like the locals: rice, dal and seasonal vegetables for lunch and chapattis at dinner with famous special Bihari food like 'Litti and Chokha' and sweets made of 'til' (sesame) occasionally. The sweets made of 'til' known as 'tilkut' of Gaya are famous all over India. In the Gurdwaras langar is served just like other Gurdwara Sahibs of India. People of different religions and castes actively take part in Gurburabs or any auspicious day of the Sikhs with great enthusiasm and a feeling of brotherhood.

CONCLUSION

When my tour came to an end on the second day, I was left with a feeling I can hardly describe. Many men, women, youth and children gave us farewell with boundless love and affection. Some Sikh brothers and functionaries of Kedli Gurdwara committee like S. Gian Singh, S. Partap Singh, S.Samsher Singh, S.Satpal Singh, S.Ashok Singh, S. Paramjit Singh Kolkata, S. Takht Singh were also among them.

There was in me a sense of fulfillment and, thrill at meeting fellow brethren and a confidence that they could take any challenge to take the spirit of Sikhism ahead. In fact they never had a crisis of Sikh identity in spite of living in isolation from the major centre of Sikhism for centuries. They are Sikhs and live with Sikhi, but are treated as outsiders by the larger brotherhood most of the times. Successful efforts of few individuals who champion the cause of Sikhs settled in many far-flung areas, and reach out to strengthen the connection between the Sikhs are quite visible. Sometimes they come and get engaged in advancing the knowledge of Gurbani and Gurmukhi of these Sikhs. These places are not explored fully, but we have to change things to know the elevating beauty of Sikhism held aloft by the diaspora. We have to take the lead in determining the future of the Sikhs outside Punjab. Their contribution to the Great House of Sikhism should be acknowledged as they face hardship from living among multiple identities. Many of them are trying to advance the knowledge of Sikhism. They have to overcome many challenges to get integrated with the unified Sikh world and deserve encouragement and recognition from the mainstream Sikh brotherhood.





ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ ਪੁਰਬ ਮੌਕੇ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਹਰਿਮੰਦਰ ਜੀ ਪਟਨਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵਿਖੇ ਨਗਰ ਕੀਰਤਨ ਦੇ ਸਵਾਗਤ ਸਮੇਂ ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਭਾਈ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਲੌਂਗੋਵਾਲ, ਸ. ਬਲਵਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਭੁੱਠੜ, ਪ੍ਰ. ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਚੱਢੂਮਾਜਰਾ, ਸ. ਦਰਬਾਰਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਅਤੇ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ। (1 ਜਨਵਰੀ)

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