

ALLEGORY: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels Episode 10: Gabhira (Depth)

'Gabhira', 'Depth' presents an overview of the attentive seer's in-depth foresight to enable decisions for impactful actions. In the city of 'Dhakeshwari', Guru Nanak is greeted by the natives of Sundarbans Delta.

naanak aakhai eh beechaar ||
sifatee ga(n)dd pavai dharabaar ||
(Raag Majh, Guru Nanak)

Nanak shares the thought that honour is established through gratitude.
(Raag Majh, Guru Nanak)

Guru Nanak included dialects in the vernacular in his writings so that the common person could understand them. The impact of his universal and humanistic message was such that people from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds embraced his philosophy.

From Sonapur, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled to Munger, Bhagalpur, Kant Nagar, Malda, Dhaka, Dhubri and reached Guwahati.

From Sonapur, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled to Munger by boat on River Ganga.

Tracing Guru Nanak's journey, we travel to Munger.

Amardeep Singh: Along the River Ganges, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana halted in Munger at the Kangan Ghat.

Hiuen Tsiang, the seventh century Chinese traveller has written in his accounts that at Munger he observed many Buddhist Monasteries and Temples. The people of Munger also worshipped Shiva and 'Shakti' (female energy) with great fervour. Islam was introduced in this region during the 13th century by the 'Turk' (Central Asian) rulers.

In Munger there is a small Sikh community which migrated here after the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. The locals informed us that the 'Udasin' (ascetic) community once had a large shrine dedicated to Guru Nanak along the banks of the River Ganga. It was destroyed during the flooding of the river.

We visit Belan Bazar to see the site which commemorates the visit of Guru Nanak and Guru Tegh Bahadur (ninth Sikh Guru) to Munger.

Amardeep Singh: This place of congregation is known as the Pakki Sangat Gurdwara. It was built by the 'Udasins' (ascetics) in the memory of Guru Nanak's visit to Munger.

This ancient Gurdwara was built by Baba Pardeshi Ram Ji Udasin. After being destroyed in the earthquake of 1934 AD, it was reconstructed by Baba Ramdas Ji Udasin in 1935 AD. We were informed that in present times, a weekly congregational service is held at this site by the Sikh officers of the Indian Army. A local family with linkages to the 'Udasin' (ascetic) tradition are the present custodians of this site. While the present generation of this family is unable to read the script of the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture, they do, however, make an effort to understand the verses which are sung during the weekly congregation.

The two words, 'Sabad' and 'Naam' are often mentioned in Guru Nanak's verses. Reflecting on the nature of reading and comprehension, I wonder how many of us who actually can read the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture, are able to grasp aspects of these profound words.

bhavajal bin sabadhai kiau tareeaaai ||
naam binaa jag rog biaapiaa dhubidhaa ddub ddub mareeaaai ||
(Raag Bhairo, Guru Nanak)

World-ocean can't be ferried without words of wisdom.
Without self-reflection, the world is diseased with duality. In doubt, it drowns and
perishes.
(Raag Bhairo, Guru Nanak)

'Sabad' connotes knowledge as a means of communication through which 'Naam', the wisdom of practicing self-reflection is acquired. 'Sabad' is the boat and 'Naam' the paddle, which helps one sail across the worldly ocean.

From Munger, travelling along the River Ganga, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana reached the city of Bhagalpur.

In Guru Nanak's footsteps, we now travel to Bhagalpur.

In Bhagalpur, we first visit Boodhanath Ghat. On the banks of the River Ganga, where stands the historic Boodhanath Temple, the locals mentioned that at the Boodhanath Ghat, a gurdwara was built by the 'Udasin' (ascetic) community to commemorate the visits of Guru Nanak and Guru Tegh Bahadur (Ninth Sikh Guru) to Bhagalpur. In present times, we find no traces of this gurdwara.

The locals directed us to the residence of the family whose ancestors were once the 'Mahant' (Priest) of the erstwhile gurdwara at Boodhanath Ghat.

Sujit Kumar Das: My name is Sujit Kumar Das. My father's name is Sri Saud Kumar Das. My grandfather was the 'Mahant' (Priest) of this site. His name was Mahant Sri San Saran Das. We have been here for about four to five generations. We have been serving Guru Ji. This is the scripture of the Guru. We learned from our ancestors that this scripture has been with our family for generations. Our ancestors would tell us the story when we were young that Guru Nanak Dev Ji came to this city. People in this area would follow his teachings and aspire to adopt his path. They would come to this place to pray and sing spiritual verses in the morning and evening. We people would provide them assistance. Earlier, there was a big gurdwara in this city. Our first Guru, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, was a messenger of peace. He travelled to distant lands to give the message of universal fellowship and to live together with love. According to him, all religions are equal. He believed in One formless Creator. According to him, all forms are manifestations of the formless Creator. After him, we people adhere to his philosophy.

We now visit the Bari Sangat Gurdwara located close to Boodhanath Ghat.

<<Recitation of 'Guru Granth Sahib'>>

It which was built in 1974 by the Sikh community of Bhagalpur to commemorate the visit of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru, to Bhagalpur.

From Bhagalpur, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled to Kant Nagar.

We now travel from Bhagalpur to Kant Nagar, a town situated on the banks of River Ganga in the present day Purnia district of Bihar.

In the region of Kant Nagar there was once a significant community of Guru Nanak's devotees of Bihari ethnicity of diverse religious backgrounds. The local Bihari followers of Guru Nanak have built many congregational centres in remote villages of this region. We now visit one of the gurdwaras in a remote village.

Amardeep Singh: On the banks of River Ganges, the village of Kant Nagar was visited by Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana. The community has built this gurdwara in the memory of their visit.

We meet Trilok Singh, a local Sikh of Bihari ethnicity, who shared with us that the late Mehersi Das, an 'Udasin' (ascetic) was instrumental in spreading the message of Guru Nanak in the regions around Kant Nagar.

Trilok Singh: Many years ago, we heard from our ancestors that Guru Nanak Dev Ji visited this region to interact with congregations on spirituality. Here in Kant Nagar, many became adherents of Guru Nanak and followed his teachings. After that, his philosophy was spread and got accepted. Like this, people spread the message of righteousness

that the entire human race is one. The central message of Oneness was left by Guru Nanak. Those who believe in this message are the ones who follow Guru Nanak Dev Ji's path. Amongst the followers of Guru Nanak, there was one Mehersi Das too. He emphasized the importance of community congregation. His students, wherever they went for congregations, people started connecting with his effort to spread the message of Guru Nanak. He made a congregational place close to Bhagalpur city, which we all know as Kuppa Ghat.

Observing women in rural areas multitasking with such ease, nurturing children, providing food to family, working in the fields, I am reminded of Guru Nanak's advocacy.

Bha(n)ddahu hee bha(n)dd uoopajai bha(n)ddai baajh na koi ||
(Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

From women, all are born. Without women, there would be no one at all.
(Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

Historically, women, the life producing gender have not been given an equitable status in patriarchal societies around the world. Guru Nanak raised a strong voice against gender discrimination. He reminded that without woman there would be no humankind.

From Kant Nagar Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled eastwards towards Malda.

In the footsteps of Guru Nanak, we now travel to Malda.

The city of Malda in the Indian state of West Bengal is situated close to the Bangladesh border. During the time of Guru Nanak's visit to this region, it was under the rule of Bengal Sultanate.

We visit the gurdwara, situated close to the River Mahananda in the old Malda city.

Amardeep Singh: The Mahananda and Ganga Rivers flow through the region of Malda. When Guru Nanak travelled through this region, it was an important river port, prominent for travel and trade.

A congregational center was built by the 'Udasin' (ascetic) community to commemorate Guru Nanak's visit to Malda. Due to the depopulation of old Malda, this site had become deserted. It was resurrected in the 1960s by the community which migrated to Malda after the partition of India in 1947.

At Malda, a money lender by the name of Ram Dev met Guru Nanak. Observing him display his affluence, Guru Nanak said,

choaa cha(n)dhan a(n)k chaRaavau ||

paaT paTa(n)bar pahir haddaavau ||
bin har naam kahaa sukh paavau ||
(Guru Nanak)

Sandalwood oil can be anointed on the limbs.
Silken clothes can be adorned on the body.
Without self-reflection, how can peace be attained?
(Guru Nanak)

Guru Nanak's message to Ram Dev was designed to help him realize that the display of affluence is a shallow state of happiness. For everlasting contentment, one is required to detach oneself from materialism.

Amardeep Singh: This gurdwara was made in the memory of Guru Nanak's visit to the Malda region.

In reverence, members of the local Bengali Hindu community also visit this gurdwara. Seeing us as visitors to Malda, the local community invited us to participate in their religious congregation.

<<Krishna Bhajan>>

In tracing Guru Nanak's footsteps, our interactions with myriad communities has given us opportunities to gain experiential learning. Hearing the Bengali devotees sing 'Bhajans' (devotional singing), I am reminded of Guru Nanak's words,

tum gaavahu mere nirabhau kaa sohilaa ||
hau vaaree jit sohilai sadhaa sukh hoi ||
(Raag Gauri Deepaki, Guru Nanak)

Sing the songs of praise of the Fearless.
I am a sacrifice unto that song which brings eternal solace.
(Raag Gauri Deepaki, Guru Nanak)

Guru Nanak says, a mind which contemplates on the ultimate reality of Oneness, remains in eternal solace. Indeed, with such a mind-set, the entire creation becomes one singular celestial house, beholding diverse entities.

From Malda, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled eastwards on the Rivers Ganga and Padma, and reached the city of Dhaka, the present-day capital of Bangladesh.

In present times, due to political reasons, the India-Bangladesh border can only be crossed at a few designated points. Hence, to retrace Guru Nanak's footsteps, we fly from India to Bangladesh and continue our journey from Dhaka.

'ALLEGORY: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels', the 24 Episode Guru Nanak Docuseries
is available in 5 languages at TheGuruNanak.com
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aa dobe dekh dekhi mon ||
ki roop leelamoy ||
aakash paatal khujish jaarey ||
eih dehey shey roi ||
laam-alef lokai jemon ||
maanush ei shai ashey temon ||
ta noiley ki shob nuriton ||
aadom toney sheshda janai ||
(Nalon Fakir)

Come, immerse, O wandering mind!
The one you search in the sky and on land.
It rests within your body.
In the way 'Laam' and 'Alif' disguise themselves.
In the same way, the Divine resides within the human.
How else to explain Nalon Fakir's path of Oneness.
Hence, I bow down to the humanity within you.
(Nalon Fakir)

Amardeep Singh: Bangladesh hosts a large delta comprising of Brahmaputra and the Ganges River. In the 16th century, when Guru Nanak travelled through this region, it was home to both, Muslim and Hindu faiths. Today, Bangladesh is an Islamic state.

Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana took the trade route that would lead to a city on the banks of the River Megha, named Sonargaon, literally meaning the golden hamlet. During the 16th century, it was a commercial hub and the capital city of the Bengal Sultanate. However, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana decided not to visit the opulent city of Sonargaon and instead proceeded to Dhaka, a city located on the banks of the River Bhuri Ganga. In those times, Dhaka city was famous for religious pilgrimage for the 'Shaivites', the followers of Shiva.

Waqar Khan: Bengal, in particular had a tradition of Sufi Saints of 'Bauls' and other mystics. It was also a land where Buddhism had flourished. Guru Nanak's quest led him to travel far and wide. He came to what now is Bangladesh. He was looking for synthesis of all religions.

We now visit the temple of Goddess Dhakeshwari, an ancient 'Shakti Peeth' shrine dedicated to feminine worship in the Hindu 'Shaivite' tradition.

Amardeep Singh: Dhaka, the name of this city is believed to be have been kept in reverence of Goddess Dhakeshwari.

Due to a population swap on the basis of religion, after the partition of 1947, this temple is now visited only by a handful of the remaining local Hindu residents of Dhaka. While we were at the temple it was heart-warming to see a Muslim seeking blessings for his new born baby. This was an indication that there still remains an interfaith and cross community connection.

Guru Nanak visited the Dhakeshwari Temple to observe religious practices and to interact with the congregation. A pilgrim asked Guru Nanak if he planned to visit Sonargaon, the opulent commercial capital.

sun mu(n)dhe haranaakhe'ee gooRaa vain apaar ||
pahilaa vasat sin(j)aan kai taa(n) keechai vaapaar ||
dhohee dhichai dhurajanaa mitraa(n) koo(n) jaikaar ||
jit dhohee sajan milan lahu mu(n)dhe veechaar ||
(Salok, Guru Nanak)

O soul-bride with deer-like eyes, listen to the words of deep and infinite wisdom.
First, examine the merchandise, then alone strike a bargain.
Remain committed, not to associate with negativity and befriend positivity.
Those commitments through which one meets noble beings, contemplate such thoughts.
(Salok, Guru Nanak)

A deer is endowed by nature with a vision which gives it a panoramic view of its surroundings. However, its eyes are unable to draw attention to a focal point, causing it to have a poor depth of perception. Guru Nanak takes the example of a deer's vision to advise that one should focus attention on the depth of positive associations and not be distracted by panoramic world of stimulants.

In the north of Dhaka, we now visit Potter's colony in Rear Bazar. Texts mention that Guru Nanak had stayed in this area during his visit to Dhaka.

The locals were unable to give us any information about any physical memory associated with Guru Nanak's visit to this area.

Avigato niramail aupaje niragun te saragun theeaa ||
(Raag Ramkali, Guru Nanak)

The eternal sublime produces formless state to become an attributable form.
(Raag Ramkali, Guru Nanak)

Our body is like a clay pot, moulded and shaped by the Creator, akin to a potter. Once the pot-like body has fulfilled its purpose, it again becomes clay, to be remodelled.

We now visit Gurdwara Nanak Shahi in Neelkhet, on the Dhaka University Campus. According to local tradition, 900 acres of land was allotted by the King of Dhaka for Nanak Shahi Gurdwara. Later, the University of Dhaka was built on these lands. The presence of 'Samadhs' (memorials) in the photograph dating 1950, indicates that this Gurdwara was then managed by the 'Udasin' (ascetic) community. It remained a popular site till the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, which resulted in the migration of most of the lovers of Guru Nanak from Dhaka. Thereafter, the building deteriorated. In the year 1988 restoration of the site was commenced. In present times, this gurdwara attracts people of diverse backgrounds.

Amardeep Singh: To commemorate Guru Nanak's visit to Dhaka, Gurdwara Nanakshahi was built in the 19th century.

We met a Hindu family who visit the gurdwara every Sunday to learn the 'Gurmukhi' script so they can read the 'Guru Granth Sahib' and gain a deeper understanding of Guru Nanak's philosophy.

too prabh dhaataa dhaan mat pooraa ||
(Guru Nanak)

You, the Omnipresent, are the bestower of grace.
(Guru Nanak)

We met another Hindu family who for many years have been visiting this gurdwara to perform Keertan during the weekly congregation.

mai kiaa maagau kichh thir na rahaiee har dheejai naam piaaree jeeau ||
(Guru Nanak)

What can I ask for? Nothing is permanent. O Omnipresent, bless me with contemplation upon Beloved's attributes.
(Guru Nanak)

We also met a Muslim mother and daughter who regularly visit this gurdwara as they feel a deep personal connection with Guru Nanak and his message of Oneness.

Gulshan: My name is Gulshan. I belong to the Muslim community. With affection, people call me Simran. I, my mother, my father and my brother visit the Guru Nanak Shahi Gurdwara. I feel very good coming here because Guru Nanak has said there is no difference between a Muslim, Hindu, Brahman, Christian. There is no discrimination here. People of all faiths visit here. Guru Nanak also visited our Mecca.

Mr. Paresh Lal Beghi, a lover of Guru Nanak, is the current President of the Nanak Shahi Gurdwara. We got an opportunity to interact with him.

Paresh Lal Beghi: His (Guru Nanak) message was that do not see religion through religious garbs. If I wear a cap, then I am seen as a Muslim. If I wear a 'Janeu' (sacred thread), then I am seen as a Hindu. There is nothing like this. We all are the children of the Divine. He used Divine expression to unite. Every third person who comes here (gurdwara) is a Muslim. They sit with us in the congregation and partake 'Langar' (free community meals).

Every Sunday, Muslim students of Dhaka University visit the Nanak Shahi Gurdwara to partake in 'Langar', the free community kitchen. A tradition which Guru Nanak seeded at Farooqabad, now in Pakistan, remains alive at Dhaka in Bangladesh.

With the supervision of Mr. Paresh Lal Beghi and the support of some members of the community from the Sikh diaspora, a project is underway to restore historical handwritten copies of the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture, which were damaged during the political conflicts of 1970s.

In accordance with Guru Nanak's message of Oneness, the interfaith harmony at Nanak Shahi Gurdwara offers hope for a harmonious future.

From Dhaka in Bangladesh, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled by boat on the Brahmaputra River to reach Dhubri in the present day State of Assam in India.

To retrace Guru Nanak's footsteps, we fly from Bangladesh to India and continue our journey from Dhubri.

Amardeep Singh: During the times of Guru Nanak, the regions of Golpara, Cooch Behar and Rangpur in Bangladesh were collectively known as Kamrup. A region heavily influenced by 'Tantric' (magic) worship practices.

At Dhubri, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana stayed on the banks of the Brahmaputra River.

Amardeep Singh: This gurdwara is built in the memory of Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana's visit to Dhubri. It also commemorates the visit of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Nanak.

Contemplating on his observations at various pilgrimage sites visited over the last few years, Guru Nanak sang on the banks of the Brahmaputra River,

Sa(n)t janaa mil sa(n)gatee guramukh teerath hoi ||
Attasatt teerath majanaa gur dharas paraapat hoi ||
(Raag Sorath, Guru Nanak)

Associating with noble people for spiritually oriented is equivalent to making a pilgrimage.

The essence of bathing at sixty-eight places of pilgrimage is obtained through the vision of true wisdom.

(Raag Sorath, Guru Nanak)

'Tirath', is a Sanskrit word that means a crossroad. It is a metaphor for self-realization through personal inquiry. Interactions with enlightened beings can be catalysts for transformation. Hence, 'Tirath', the true pilgrimage, does not comprise physical visits to religious sites but consists of acquiring spiritual wisdom to transcend the state of darkness to light.

At the gurdwara in Dhubri, historical handwritten copies of the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture, are preserved.

From Dhubri, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana continued their journey by boat on the Brahmaputra River towards Guwahati. This region was then known as 'Kamrup'.

In Guru Nanak's footsteps, we now travel from Dhubri to Guwahati.

During the time when Guru Nanak visited Guwahati, this city was known as 'Prayag Jyotispur'. In the 15th century, the Kochi people of Kamrup region were entrenched in 'Tantric' esoteric magical practices. They worshipped 'Shakti', the feminine life force in the form of Goddess Kamakhya.

We now visit the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati.

Amardeep Singh: Located within the city on Nilachal Hill is the Kamakhya Temple, a seat of 'Shakti' (feminine worship) where 'Tantric' (magic) worship is practiced.

At Kamrup, when Bhai Mardana went to get food, a group of native women, the followers of Goddess Kamakhya, hypnotized him with their 'Tantric' (magic) powers. Though in the 'Janamsakhi' texts and artworks, this incident is depicted as a physical transformation of Bhai Mardana into a male sheep, I personally believe that the women hampered his ability to comprehend, comparable to the characteristics of sheep. These art works are a metaphoric depiction of an entrapped human mind having lost the power of rational thinking under the spell of negativity.

Anticipating that Bhai Mardana might be in trouble, Guru Nanak went out to look for him. The same women tried to entice Guru Nanak too. However, he remained unaffected. Instead of reprimanding the women, Guru Nanak sang to encourage them to transform their thoughts,

karanee kaaman je theeai je man dhaagaa hoi ||

maanak mul na paieeai leejai chit paroi ||
raahy dhasaiee na julaa(n) aakhaa(n) a(n)maReeas ||
tai she naal akooanaa kiau theevai ghar vaas ||
naanak ekee baaharaa dhoojaa naahee koi ||
tai she lagee je rahai bhee sahu raavai soi ||
(Raag Vadhans, Guru Nanak)

If actions are good, then the mind becomes a thread of virtues.
The jewel of wisdom obtained is priceless, which is strung in the consciousness.
One does not walk the revealed path yet claims to have reached the destination.
Silencing the practice of self-reflection, how can one retain the internal abode.
Nanak says, there is nothing beyond Oneness.
If the soul-bride remains united, it can then enjoy eternal peace.
(Raag Vadhans, Guru Nanak)

Guru Nanak says the ones with virtuous thoughts can't be influenced by adversity. They enjoy the company of ambrosial solace.

Still unable to comprehend Guru Nanak's noble intentions, the women tried to charm him with their singing but it was of no avail. Having failed again, the women now attempted to lure him with materialistic offerings. Undeterred by their charms and remaining steadfast in his principles, Guru Nanak sang,

Taal madheere ghaT ke ghaaT ||
Dholak dhuneeaa vaajeh vaaj ||
Naaradh naachai kal kaa bhaau ||
Jatee satee keh raakheh paau ||
Naanak naam viThau kurabaan ||
A(n)dhee dhuneeaa saahib jaan ||
(Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

Impulses of the mind are like cymbals and ankle bells.
People's desires are like an echo of a drum.
A hyporite dances on the tunes of deceit.
Where can discipline and truth place their feet?
Nanak remains sacrificed to self-awareness.
The world is blind to all-pervasiveness.
(Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

The fickle mind dances to the tunes of desires. Contentment can be obtained by understanding the eternal truth of Oneness. The environment creates perceptions, which condition the mind to behave in a certain manner. Liberating expressions, if understood, can crystallize perceptions to evolve ones personality. Hearing Guru Nanak's words of wisdom, the misguided women's misconceptions were addressed.

I know that we are all born with inherent attributes of goodness, yet, I remain in doubt and am entrapped in materialism and desires. How can I overcome them?

kanik kaamanee het gavaaraa ||
dhubidhaa laage naam visaaraa ||
(Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

The ignorant remain attached to materialism and desires.
Bound by doubt, they forget self-reflection.
(Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

Discussion Pointers

ALLEGORY: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels Episode 10: Gabhira (Depth)

These discussion points offer a structured approach to exploring Guru Nanak's journey through eastern India and Bangladesh. They provide historical insight into his travels across diverse religious landscapes, the significance of the Udasin tradition in preserving his legacy, key sites linked to his odyssey, and the universal resonance of his message across various communities. On a philosophical level, these points invite an exploration of his profound concepts such as 'Sabad' and 'Naam,' his unwavering commitment to gender equality, insights on the contrast between material wealth and spiritual wisdom, and his perspective of true pilgrimage. The narrative of this episode showcases Guru Nanak's ability to connect with diverse cultural and religious traditions while consistently articulating a message of universality. His meaningful interactions with individuals from varied backgrounds—from Bihari villagers to Bengali Hindus, Muslims in Dhaka, and practitioners of Tantric traditions in Kamrup—illustrate how he tailored his message to address specific concerns while emphasizing core principles of Oneness, equality, and inner transformation. These pointers not only enhance our understanding of how Guru Nanak's philosophy crossed geographical, linguistic, and religious divides but also affirm a legacy that continues to inspire interfaith harmony and spiritual exploration among the diverse communities he touched.

Historical Discussion Pointers:

1. What was Guru Nanak's journey route through eastern India and Bangladesh, and what significant religious and cultural contexts did he encounter?

The episode maps Guru Nanak's eastward journey: From Sonapur, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled to Munger, Bhagalpur, Kant Nagar, Malda, Dhaka, Dhubri and reached Guwahati. This journey took them through diverse religious landscapes. In Munger, historical accounts indicate that Hiuen Tsiang, the seventh-century Chinese traveller has written in his accounts that at Munger he observed many Buddhist Monasteries and Temples. The people of Munger also worshipped Shiva (masculine energy) and Shakti (feminine energy) with great fervour. Islam was introduced in this region during the 13th century by the 'Turk' (Central Asian) rulers. In Bangladesh, in the 16th century, when Guru Nanak travelled through this region, it was home to both Muslim and Hindu faiths. When they reached Assam, they encountered the Kochi people of the Kamrup, a region heavily influenced by 'Tantric' (magic) esoteric magical practices. They worshipped 'Shakti', the feminine life force in the form of Goddess Kamakhya. How might these diverse religious contexts have influenced Guru Nanak's interactions and spiritual viewpoints as he traveled through these regions?

2. How did the Udasin tradition contribute to preserving Guru Nanak's legacy in eastern India and Bangladesh?

The episode highlights the significant role of the Udasin tradition in preserving Guru Nanak's legacy throughout his journey route. It mentions that in Bihar, many centres were established by the 'Udasin' (ascetic) sect to spread the philosophy of Guru Nanak but in recent times, most of them have gone into oblivion. In Munger, the Pakki Sangat Gurdwara... was built by the 'Udasins' (ascetics) in the memory of Guru Nanak's visit to Munger. The episode notes this ancient Gurdwara was built by Baba Pardeshi Ram Ji Udasin and later reconstructed by Baba Ramdas Ji Udasin in 1935 AD after an earthquake. In Bhagalpur, at the Boodhanath Ghat, a gurdwara was built by the 'Udasin' (ascetic) community to commemorate the visits of Guru Nanak and Guru Tegh Bahadur. The episode also provides insight into the tradition's origin and the community's 'Udasin' way of life, which involves separating from worldly attachments and devoting oneself to the pursuit of the Divine. How did this tradition help maintain Guru Nanak's presence in regions distant from Punjab, and what factors have contributed to the decline of these centers in recent times?

3. What historical sites are associated with Guru Nanak's journey, and what is their current state?

The episode identifies several sites associated with Guru Nanak's journey, with varying states of preservation. In Munger, the Pakki Sangat Gurdwara was destroyed in the earthquake of 1934 AD, it was reconstructed by Baba Ramdas Ji Udasin in 1935 AD. Currently, a weekly congregational service is held at this site by the Sikh officers of the Indian Army. A local family with linkages to the 'Udasin' (ascetic) tradition are the present custodians of this site. In Bhagalpur, a gurdwara was built by the 'Udasin' (ascetic) community. In present times, we find no traces of this gurdwara. In Malda, a congregational center was built by the 'Udasin' (ascetic) community to commemorate Guru Nanak's visit. Due to the depopulation of old Malda, this site had become deserted. It was resurrected in the 1960s by the community which migrated to Malda after the partition of India in 1947. In Dhaka, Gurdwara Nanak Shahi in Neelkhet remains active, though it remained a popular site till the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, which resulted in the migration of most of the lovers of Guru Nanak from Dhaka. Thereafter, the building deteriorated. In the year 1988, restoration of the site was commenced. What does the current state of these sites suggest about the historical continuity of Guru Nanak's legacy in these regions?

4. How does the episode describe the cultural and religious context of Kamrup (Assam) during Guru Nanak's visit?

The episode explores the cultural and religious practices in the Kamrup region, which is present-day Assam, during Guru Nanak's visit. It explains that during his time, the areas of Golpara, Cooch Behar, and Rangpur in Bangladesh were collectively referred to as Kamrup, a region significantly influenced by 'Tantric' worship practices. When Guru Nanak visited Guwahati, the city was known as 'Prayag Jyotispur'. In the 15th century, the Kochi people of the Kamrup region were deeply involved in 'Tantric'

esoteric magical practices, worshipping 'Shakti', the feminine life force embodied by Goddess Kamakhya. The episode recounts a notable encounter in Kamrup: when Bhai Mardana went to get food, he was hypnotized by a group of native women who were followers of Goddess Kamakhya, using their 'Tantric' powers. While traditional accounts describe this event as a physical transformation, the episode suggests it was likely a metaphorical depiction of a human mind entrapped and losing its rational thinking ability under the influence of negativity. How did this episode provide context for Guru Nanak's influence on critical thinking among the people in this region, who practice a unique culture and religion during his travels?

5. What evidence does the episode provide about diverse community support for Guru Nanak's spiritual messages?

The episode presents numerous examples of how Guru Nanak's philosophy attracted followers from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. In Kant Nagar, there was once a significant community of Guru Nanak's devotees of Bihari ethnicity of diverse religious backgrounds. In Malda, in reverence, members of the local Bengali Hindu community also visit this gurdwara. In Dhaka, at the Nanak Shahi Gurdwara, a Hindu family visit the gurdwara every Sunday to learn the 'Gurmukhi' script so they can read the 'Guru Granth Sahib', while another Hindu family has for many years been visiting this gurdwara to perform Keertan during the weekly congregation. The episode also mentions a Muslim mother and daughter who regularly visit this gurdwara as they feel a deep personal connection with Guru Nanak and his message of Oneness. The current President of the gurdwara stated that every third person who comes to the gurdwara is a Muslim. They sit in the congregation and partake in 'Langar' (free community meals). Furthermore, from the donor name plates at most of the 'Udasin' (ascetic) sites, it is interesting to note that these centres, established to spread the message of Guru Nanak, were set up with donations from the local non-Sikh community. What might this reveal about the universal appeal of Guru Nanak's philosophy beyond specific religious identities?

6. How did Guru Nanak's incorporation of local languages and dialects contribute to the spread of his message?

The episode highlights Guru Nanak's linguistic approach to sharing his perspectives. Guru Nanak included dialects in the vernacular in his writings so that the common person could understand them. The impact of his universal and humanistic message was such that people from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds embraced his philosophy. This deliberate linguistic inclusivity appears to have contributed significantly to the wide acceptance of his messages across diverse regions. For example, in Kant Nagar, a local Sikh of Bihari ethnicity shared that many became adherents of Guru Nanak and followed his messages. After that, his philosophy was spread and got accepted. Similarly, in Bangladesh, a Muslim woman named Gulshan explained that she feels good coming here because Guru Nanak has said there is no difference between a Muslim, Hindu, Brahman, Christian. There is no discrimination here. How might Guru Nanak's linguistic approach have facilitated

cross-cultural understanding and the spread of his universal message across linguistic and cultural boundaries?

Philosophical Discussion Pointers:

1. How does Guru Nanak explain the concepts of 'Sabad' and 'Naam' in his messages?

The episode presents Guru Nanak's concepts of 'Sabad' and 'Naam' as essential concepts in his spiritual framework: 'Sabad' connotes knowledge as a means of communication through which 'Naam', the wisdom of practicing self-reflection is acquired. 'Sabad' is the boat and 'Naam' the paddle, which helps one sail across the worldly ocean. This metaphor appears in his verse, which says that the world-ocean can't be ferried without words of wisdom. Without self-reflection, the world is diseased with duality. In doubt, it drowns and perishes. The episode also notes that in Bhagalpur, while the current generation of caretakers at a historic site is unable to read the script of the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture, they do, however, make an effort to understand the verses which are sung during the weekly congregation. This raises the question: how many of us who actually can read the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture, are able to grasp aspects of these profound words. How does Guru Nanak's explanation of 'Sabad' and 'Naam' challenge conventional understanding of religious texts and spiritual practice?

2. What is Guru Nanak's perspective on gender equality as reflected in his verses?

The episode highlights Guru Nanak's strong stance on gender equality through his verse, which states that from women, all are born, without women, there would be no one at all. The episode explains this position that historically, women, the life-producing gender, have not been given an equitable status in patriarchal societies around the world. Guru Nanak raised a strong voice against gender discrimination. He reminded us that without women there would be no humankind. This philosophical perspective appears directly connected to his observations of women's contributions to society, as the episode notes: Observing women in rural areas multitasking with such ease, nurturing children, providing food to family, working in the fields, one is reminded of Guru Nanak's advocacy. How might this progressive stance on gender equality have challenged prevailing social norms of his time, and what implications does it have for understanding the broader social dimensions of his spiritual messages?

3. How does Guru Nanak contrast material wealth with spiritual wisdom?

The episode presents several instances where Guru Nanak addresses the contrast between material wealth and spiritual wisdom. In Malda, when meeting Ram Dev, a money lender displaying his affluence, Guru Nanak said that sandalwood oil can be anointed on the limbs. Silken clothes can be adorned on the body. Without self-reflection, how can peace be attained? The episode explains that Guru Nanak's message to Ram Dev was designed to help him realize that the display of affluence

is a shallow state of happiness. For everlasting contentment, one is required to detach oneself from materialism. Similarly, in Hajipur, he advised Salis Rai to not let affluence hinder spiritual growth and noted that Adhraka, though a modest employee, could be more enlightened. Humility and not social, religious or economic status is the touchstone of goodness. How does this philosophical perspective challenge conventional measures of success and fulfillment, and what alternatives does Guru Nanak offer for finding lasting contentment?

4. What is Guru Nanak's conception of true pilgrimage (Tirath) as described in the episode?

The episode reveals Guru Nanak's radical reinterpretation of the concept of pilgrimage. While contemplating at Dhubri on the banks of the Brahmaputra River, Guru Nanak sang his verse, which suggests that associating with noble people who are spiritually oriented is equivalent to making a pilgrimage. The episode explains that 'Tirath', is a Sanskrit word that means a crossroad. It is a metaphor for self-realization through personal inquiry. Interactions with enlightened beings can be catalysts for transformation. Hence, 'Tirath', the true pilgrimage, does not involve physical visits to religious sites but rather acquiring spiritual wisdom to transcend the state of darkness to light. This perspective directly challenged the prevailing practices of his time. For instance, when a pilgrim asked about the significance of dying in Varanasi for liberation, he responded that one who submits to wisdom never dies and said that without the death of negativity, how can wisdom be attained? How does this reconceptualization of pilgrimage transform understanding of spiritual growth from external journeys to internal transformation?

5. How does Guru Nanak's interaction with the women of Kamrup reveal his approach to transformation rather than condemnation?

The episode describes a significant encounter in Kamrup where a group of native women, the followers of Goddess Kamakhya, hypnotized [Bhai Mardana] with their 'Tantric' (magic) powers. When Guru Nanak went searching for him, the same women tried to entice Guru Nanak too. However, he remained unaffected. The episode highlights that instead of reprimanding the women, Guru Nanak inspired them through his spiritual verses, encouraging them to change their thoughts. He expressed this idea with the verse that expressed that if actions are good, then the mind becomes a thread of virtues. The wisdom gained from this understanding is invaluable, woven into the fabric of consciousness. Even when the women continued their attempts to charm him, he remained undeterred and true to his principles, responding with another verse rather than condemning them. The episode concludes that hearing Guru Nanak's words of wisdom, the misguided women's misconceptions were addressed. This approach demonstrates his philosophy that transformation comes through wisdom rather than through punishment or rebuke. How does this episode illustrate Guru Nanak's belief in the inherent potential for goodness in all people and his approach to spiritual transformation through wisdom rather than coercion?

6. How does Guru Nanak use the metaphor of the deer's vision to illustrate his thoughts about focus and distraction?

The episode presents a unique metaphor that Guru Nanak used in response to a pilgrim who asked about visiting the wealthy city of Sonargaon. He sang a verse that metaphorically expresses that first, one should examine the merchandise, then strike a bargain alone. Remain committed, not to associate with negativity and befriend positivity. Through these commitments, one meets noble beings and contemplates meaningful thoughts. The metaphor of the deer is interesting, as it expresses that while a deer has a natural ability to see its surroundings in a panoramic view, its eyes lack the ability to focus on specific details, leading to poor depth perception. Guru Nanak uses this example to advise that one should concentrate on fostering deep, positive relationships rather than getting distracted by the array of superficial worldly attractions. This teaching appears particularly relevant in a world of distractions and superficial attractions. How does this metaphor provide insight into Guru Nanak's perspectives about discernment, focus, and the cultivation of meaningful relationships rather than being scattered across numerous superficial pursuits?