

ALLEGORY: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels Episode 17: Noor-e-Tawheed (Light of Oneness)

'Parvaas', 'Sojourn', presents the altruistic traveller's return to his native land of five rivers after 12 years to soon embark on another odyssey. It also rekindles memories of Saints who practiced the same spirituality as Guru Nanak.

jehee rut kaiaa sukh tehaa teho jehee dhehee ||
naanak rut suhaavee saiee bin naavai rut kehee ||
(Raag Malar, Guru Nanak)

As is the season, so is the body's comfort and so is the state of the body.
O Nanak, that season is beautiful when one introspects. Without self-reflection, what
season can it be?
(Raag Malar, Guru Nanak)

Circumstances influence human temperament just like the journey of the earth around the Sun brings changes in seasons. Guru Nanak says, through introspection, we can reap the benefits of circumstantial learning.

From Chittorgarh, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled northwards to Ajmer, Pushkar, Mathura, Delhi, Panipat, Takhtupura, Sultanpur Lodhi, Patti, Ghawindi, Jahman, Dera Chahal and reached Nankana Sahib. From Chittorgarh, they first travelled to Ajmer.

Tracing Guru Nanak's footsteps, we travel from Chittorgarh to Ajmer.

Hazrat khawaja sang kheliye dhamal ||

I play with Hazrat Khwaja in admiration.

The city of Ajmer in the state of Rajasthan in India is built around the Anasagar Lake.

Amardeep Singh: Surrounded by the Aravalli Hills, the city of Ajmer, known for the shrine of the mystic, Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, is popularly known as the gateway to Pushkar.

Hazrat khawaja sang kheliye dhamal ||

I play with Hazrat Khwaja in admiration.

We pay a visit to Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti's Mausoleum at the foot of the Taragarh Hill.

Hazrat khawaja sang kheliye dhamal ||

I play with Hazrat Khwaja in admiration.

Born in Sistan in Iran, the 12th century Sufi saint, Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, settled in Ajmer. He is credited for introducing the 'Chishti' order in India.

Baees khawaja mil bun bun aayo ||

I play with Hazrat Khwaja in admiration.

The 'Chishti' practice is notable for 'Sama' which entails evoking the presence of the Divine through music in the form of 'Qawwali'.

<<Qawwali>>

Baba Sheikh Farid Shakarganj of Pakpattan, whose verses were collated by Guru Nanak and later enshrined in the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture, was amongst the noted disciples of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti. Baba Farid had spent considerable time in devotion at this shrine. A memorial is built here in his memory.

At this shrine, Guru Nanak met with Allaudin and Sagrasudin, the disciples of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti. They discussed the mandate of the Islamic clergy to perform the five prayers as an obligatory daily adherence. In reply, Guru Nanak sang,

soiee kaajee jin aap tajiaa ik naam keeaa aadhaaro ||
hai bhee hosee jai na jaasee sachaa sirajanahaaro ||
pa(n)j vakhat nivaaj gujaareh paReh kateb kuraanaa ||
naanak aakhai gor sadheiee rahio peenaa khaanaa ||
(Sri Raag, Guru Nanak)

An arbiter is the one who renounces self-conceit and lives by the principle of Oneness.
It was, it is and will always be. Neither was it born nor will it perish; the True cosmic energy.

You may say prayers five times each day; you may read the Abrahamic scriptures or the Quran.

Says Nanak, when the grave calls you, eating and drinking will all stop.
(Sri Raag, Guru Nanak)

Prayers are intended to inspire the mind to seek beyond the mundane activities of existence. Guru Nanak says, a mere ritualistic recitation is futile unless the higher purpose of Oneness is imbibed beyond the biases of gender, religion and status.

From Ajmer, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana crossed the Aravalli Hills to visit the nearby city of Pushkar.

We visit Pushkar, the city which is acclaimed by Hindus as one of the 'Tirath-Raj'; the king of pilgrimage sites.

Amardeep Singh: The word 'Pushkar' means a 'Lotus Flower', which is believed to be the seat of 'Brahma', one of the holy trinity of the Hindu Gods, worshipped as the creator of the universe.

The famous Pushkar Lake is surrounded by 52 'ghats'; the lakefront steps, where many temples are located. One of the 'ghats' is dedicated to Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Nanak.

The Jagatpita Brahma Mandir, located close to the Pushkar Lake, is said to be the only temple dedicated to Lord Brahma, one of the Hindu Trinity Gods, considered as the creator of the universe.

We now visit the Pushkar Gurdwara.

Amardeep Singh: This gurdwara in Pushkar stands as a memory of Guru Nanak's visit to the city of temples.

Pushkar is not only known for pilgrimage but is also famous for hosting one of India's largest camel and livestock fairs, known as 'Kartik Mela'. The fair attracts a large number of tourists, apart from devotees and traders.

'Supna' denotes a dream state in which a person is in a deep sleep but the consciousness remains awake. Observing people performing a myriad of activities, I reflect on the conditioned state of mind which subconsciously keeps performing mundane activities. Guru Nanak seeks to transcend to a state of conscious awareness.

supanai aaiaa bhee giaa mai jal bhariaa roi ||
aai na sakaa tujh kan piaare bhej na sakaa koi ||
aau sabhaagee needhaRe'e mat sahu dhekhaa soi ||
(Raag Vadhans, Guru Nanak)

In a dream state, consciousness appears and disappears, making me distressed.
I can't attain realization nor motivate others.
Come to me, O blessed state where I can realize my true self.
(Raag Vadhans, Guru Nanak)

From Pushkar, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled to Mathura.

In Guru Nanak's footsteps, we travel to Mathura.

Mathura, a city in Uttar Pradesh, is situated on the banks of the river Yamuna. It is one of the 'Saptapuri', the seven cities considered holy by Hindus as it is the birthplace of Lord Krishna. Being a place of religious importance, Mathura attracted congregations of spiritualists. Hence, Guru Nanak visited this city to interact with people.

According to the 'Meherban Janamsakhi', during their stay in Mathura, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana visited the Keshav Deva Temple dedicated to Lord Krishna's birth.

We visit the Krishna Janamasthan Temple Complex which was built in the year 1953, on the same location as the erstwhile historic Keshav Deva Temple.

The essential message of Lord Krishna's famous discourse, the 'Geeta Saar' in the epic of 'Mahabharat' is to let go of attachments. This wisdom can be understood by regarding its characters as metaphors. 'Pandavas', the five brothers, represent the five human sensory organs which facilitate experiencing, studying, hearing, contemplating and discussing. This process is facilitated by a common factor, their consort, 'Draupadi', who represents faith. The opponents, 'Kauravas', the hundred brothers, represent multitude forms of ignorance which influence the mind. In the battleground, Krishna, the charioteer, guides the reins of the five horses, which represent the five human senses. Krishna is represented as the all-knowing, all-existing supreme self, the human consciousness, which facilitates spiritual victory.

Epics can give physiological insights into human nature when the layers of philosophical depth are explored and understood; else they remain mere symbolic religious texts.

keteeaa ka(n)n(h) kahaaneeaa kete bedh beechaar ||
(Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

There are many spiritual stories and many reflections on scriptures.
(Raag Asa, Guru Nanak)

Since eternity, the core philosophies of all beliefs have the same deeper message. They get re-formulated as times evolve. Guru Nanak reminds us that there are numerous epics, discussions and interpretations. However, wisdom cannot be attained through mere words.

During discourses at the Keshav Deva Temple, some 'Vaishnavite' pilgrims, the followers of Lord Vishnu, asked Guru Nanak, what kind of services and methods are needed for the union with the Divine. In his response, Guru Nanak sang,

sahaj milai miliaa paravaan ||
naa tis maran na aavan jaan ||

Thaakur meh dhaas dhaas meh soi ||
jeh dhekhaa teh avar na koi ||
gurmukh bhagat sahaj ghar paieeaaai ||
bin gur bheTe mar aaieeaaai jaieeaaai ||
(Raag Dhanasri, Guru Nanak)

The union that is acquired through intuitive stillness is acceptable.
Thereafter there is no suffering of transmigration.
The Master is in the slave and the slave in the Master.
Wherever I look, I see nothing else but unity.
Those inclined to introspection and equipoise find their celestial abode.
Without gaining wisdom, they remain spiritually dead in transmigration of thoughts.
(Raag Dhanasri, Guru Nanak)

Mindfulness is the ability to be aware of our actions and equipoise is the act of consciously balancing them. We can be too meek and lose courage to stand up for justice or can be too exacting and lack empathy. Guru Nanak says, 'Sehaj', a combination of mindfulness, equipoise, universal love and acceptance of the law of nature, can be an effective way to unite with the Divine.

In the Mathura city, we visit Gurdwara Nanak Bageechi.

Amardeep Singh: In remembrance of Guru Nanak's dialogue with the 'Vaishnavites', Gurdwara Nanak Bageechi has been made close to the Keshav Deva Temple.

We visit the 'ghats', riverfront steps along the banks of the River Yamuna. Historically, these stepped 'ghats' have attracted Hindu pilgrims who take a sacred bath in hope of absolution of their sins.

At the 'ghats', some 'Shaivite' natives, the followers of Lord Shiva, asked Guru Nanak about his social status and his religious mentor. In reply, Guru Nanak sang,

apune Thaakur kee hau cheree ||
charan gahe jagajeevan prabh ke haumai maar niberee ||
(Raag Sarang, Guru Nanak)

I am the hand-maiden of my Master.
I have grasped the feet of the life-creating force by eradicating my ego.
(Raag Sarang, Guru Nanak)

Guru Nanak says, service to others is his social status. In humility, he equates himself to a hand-maiden who has given up herself in service of the Omnipresent. He professes that his religious mentor is the wisdom which eradicates his ego.

Enslavement is most commonly associated with physical bondage. Unfortunately, we overlook the slavery of the mind which is bound by attachments to identities and desires.

We now visit a site on the banks of the River Yamuna which was established by the 'Udasin' (ascetic) community.

Amardeep Singh: This 'Udasin Muth' at Gau Ghat is the oldest site made in the memory of Guru Nanak's visit to Mathura.

A local resident mentioned that the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture, was enshrined at this site till the political events of the 1980s. In present times, Guru Nanak is revered only as a memory of the past association with the 'Udasin' (ascetic) tradition.

From Mathura, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled to Delhi.

Tracing Guru Nanak's footsteps, we visit Delhi.

Delhi, the capital of India, is located on the banks of the Yamuna River. Inhabited since 6th century, there are varying accounts as to the origin of its name. Some historians say, it is derived from the word 'dil' meaning 'heart', and some believe it came from the word 'dehleez', meaning 'gateway', symbolically an entry to the Gangetic plain.

Amardeep Singh: Delhi, the capital of India, witnessing various rulers, has remained the centre of Governance for centuries.

When Guru Nanak visited this city it was under the rule of Sikandar Lodhi, the Afghan King.

We visit a locality on the banks of the River Yamuna which was historically known as 'Majnu Ka Tilla', literally meaning, Majnu's mound. It was named after the Iranian Sufi saint, Fakir Abdullah, who was known as Majnu, the one who is lost in the Beloved's love.

Amardeep Singh: Gurdwara 'Majnu Ka Tilla' is built on a site where Guru Nanak had dialogues with a Sufi Fakir.

History mentions that Sikandar Lodhi, the ruler of the Delhi Sultanate, was a man of polarities. He was known for being generous to charities but was also intolerant of other religions. The 'Meherban Janamsakhi' mentions that during a congregation with Fakir Abdullah and other spiritualists, Guru Nanak was asked about his opinion on the importance of charity and if giving alms in abundance was an entitlement of being a noble being. In reply, Guru Nanak sang,

a(n)dhee ka(n)mee a(n)dh man man a(n)dhai tan a(n)dh ||
chikaR laiaai kиаa theeai jaa(n) tuTai pathar ba(n)dh ||

ba(n)dh tuTaa beRee nahee naa tulahaa naa haath ||
naanak sache naam vin kete ddube saath ||
(Raag Malar, Guru Nanak)

Through thoughtless actions, the mind is influenced by negativities. The ignorant mind makes the body impaired.

Why plaster with mud when even a dam made of stones gives way.
The dam has burst. There is neither a boat nor a raft or an oar.
O Nanak, without contemplating on the Truth, multitudes have drowned.
(Raag Malar, Guru Nanak)

It is a misconception that injustice can be overlooked by performing acts of charity. Guru Nanak says, for those who harbour discrimination, their noble deeds are akin to a dyke which cannot withhold the effects of raging floods.

This philosophical message does not find mention in the 'Vilayatwali Janamsakhi' and 'Bhai Mani Singh Janamsakhi'. These texts speak of a miraculous event in which Guru Nanak brought to life a dead elephant during his visit to Delhi. Such discrepancies in narratives force me to wonder whether with the passage of time we have drifted away from Guru Nanak's profound spiritual words, analogies and metaphors.

eih man maigal kahaa baseeale kahaa basai ih pavanaa ||
kahaa basai su sabadh aaudhoo taa kau chookai man kaa bhavanaa ||
(Raag Ramkali, Guru Nanak)

Where does the mind that behaves as an elephant reside? Where does the breath reside?

Where does that wisdom reside which can shun the negativities and cease the wanderings of the mind?
(Raag Ramkali, Guru Nanak)

Elephants are known to have a sharp memory aiding a contemplative mind for cognitive learning. Guru Nanak says, when the attributes represented by the elephant mind cease to exist in human beings, they can be revived by critical thinking, the evolved state of human consciousness. In my humble opinion, the act of bringing alive an elephant is a metaphoric representation of this philosophical message.

Gurdwara Nanak Piao, at a distance of about 8 kilometres from Gurdwara 'Majnu Ka Tilla' is another site dedicated to Guru Nanak's visit to Delhi. It is mentioned in 'Mahan Kosh', written by the noted writer Kahan Singh Nabha that Guru Nanak quenched the thirst of travellers by giving water from a well at this site. In my humble opinion, this physical well is a metaphoric representation of a repository of wisdom, which Guru Nanak imparted to quench the spiritual thirst of the people.

From Delhi, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled to Panipat.

Following Guru Nanak's footsteps, we travel to Panipat.

Panipat is a historic city in the Indian state of Haryana. According to the epic Mahabharat, it was founded by the 'Pandava' brothers. Famous as weavers city, it is strategically located on the Grand Trunk Road, a 3rd century trade and travel route which connects the Indian subcontinent to central Asia.

At Panipat, we visit the shrine of Bu Ali Qalandar Sheikh Sharaf-ud-Din, a 14th century Muslim Saint who was popularly known as Shah Sharaf.

mei hu(n) kismat ka sika(n)dar ||
varna katrey mei samundar ||
mei ali ka hu(n) kala(n)dar ||
japu har dum ali maula ||
ratu har dum ali maula ||
hirday har dum ali maula ||
hai meri sas key a(n)dar ||
mei ali ka hu(n) kala(n)dar ||

I am the king of destiny.
Else, I would have remained a drop in the ocean.
I am a 'Qalandar' (non-conformist) belonging to the Divine.
In every breath, contemplate on the Divine.
In every breath, recite the name of the Divine.
In every breath, remain attuned with the Divine.
Divine resides in my breath.
I am a 'Qalandar' (non-conformist) belonging to the Divine.

Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana, during their stay in Panipat, visited the shrine of Shah Sharaf as it was a place of congregation for Sufi spiritualists.

Sheikh Tahir, also known as Sheikh Idul Kabir, is referred as Sheikh Tatihar in the 'Janamsakhi' literature. On hearing Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana sing verses of profound wisdom, he welcomed them to the shrine.

Amardeep Singh: Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana interacted with Sheikh Tahir, the then spiritual head at the shrine of Bu Ali Shah Qalandar in Panipat.

During the discourses, devotees of the shrine asked Guru Nanak about the attributes of a clear-hearted person. In reply, Guru Nanak sang,

sidhak kar sijadhaa man kar makhasoodh ||

jeh dhir dhekhaa teh dhir maujoodh ||
(Sri Raag, Guru Nanak)

Let sincerity be your bowing in prayer, and conquest of your mind be your objective in
life.

In all directions, I see the One unifying force.
(Sri Raag, Guru Nanak)

Guru Nanak says, people of virtue have a vision beyond the realms of religious protocols. For them, the 'Sijda', bowing while praying, represents the humble submission of their egoistic intellect, thus allowing them to see the presence of One in all.

Sufi Ijaz Ahmed Hashmi: Nanak Sahib travelled with a message. He imparted the wisdom of love and universal fellowship at various places. He said to respect elders, love the young and the underprivileged. The one who has established a direct connection with Divinity, does not discriminate. That person sees everyone with respect and equality and embraces everyone. Nanak Sahib is also from the community of 'Qalandars' (non-conformists). 'Qalandars' (non-conformists) seek solitude.

mast kala(n)dar, mast kala(n)dar, mast kala(n)dar ||
ali da pehla n(n)bar ||
lalo ka lal kala(n)dar ||
dada hayat kala(n)dar ||
rabiya basri kala(n)dar ||
shah sarfuddin kala(n)dar ||
husseni lal kala(n)dar ||
bu ali shah kala(n)dar ||
dama dum mast kala(n)dar ||

The ecstatic 'Qalandar' (non-conformist).

Divine is first amongst all.

Beloved of all beloved 'Qalandar' (non-conformist).

Dada Hayat, the 'Qalandar' (non-conformist).

Rabia Basri, the 'Qalandar' (non-conformist).

Shah Sharaf-ud-Din, the 'Qalandar' (non-conformist).

Hussaini Lal, the 'Qalandar' (non-conformist).

Bu Ali Shah, the 'Qalandar' (non-conformist).

In every breath resides the 'Qalandar' (non-conformist).

From Panipat, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled to Takhtupura in Punjab.

We visit Takhtupura village where stands a gurdwara in the memory of Guru Nanak's visit.

From Takhtupura, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana crossed the Sutlej River and reached Sultanpur Lodhi.

Tracing Guru Nanak's footsteps, we travel to Sultanpur Lodhi.

Meeting her brother after years, Bebe Nanaki was delighted to see Guru Nanak beaming with spiritual radiance. The people of Sultanpur Lodhi were eager to meet Guru Nanak who had once served here as a 'Modi, an officer at the State granary. They desired to hear from him about his travels and experiences while intermingling with diverse cultures and belief systems. Anticipating that Guru Nanak would have experienced the Divine in places of worship, they inquired as to its physical attributes. In response, Guru Nanak sang,

je kih hoi ta kih dhisai jaapai roop na jaat ||
sabh kaaran karataa kare ghaT aaughaT ghaT thaap ||
aakhan aaukhaa naanakaa aakh na jaapai aakh ||
(Raag Sarang, Guru Nanak)

If it were something, then it would be visible. Its form and status cannot be seen.
The Cosmic Energy does all deeds. It is established in the hearts of the high and the low.

It is difficult to describe it, O Nanak. It cannot be described in words.
(Raag Sarang, Guru Nanak)

One tends to perceive matter, mind and the consciousness as disconnected. Guru Nanak however reinforces the concept that 'Nirgun', the invisible attributes and 'Sargun', the visible attributes are connected, implying that Divinity is essentially formless, yet all pervading. It is through conduct that one attains or distances oneself from Divinity.

From Sultanpur Lodhi, we make a detour from Guru Nanak's trail to visit the village of Sohal Thatti to explore memories of Bhagat Sain, a Saint whose philosophy was aligned with that of Guru Nanak's.

There are varying accounts about Bhagat Sain's place of birth. According to popular tradition, he is believed to have been born in 1390 AD at village Sohal Thatti in a family of barber community, who were considered as low caste.

Bhagat Sain was a personification of selfless service. He diligently performed his duties as a personal attendant of a King during the day and devoted his nights in serving the spiritually minded and the needy.

Bhagat Sain lived much before Guru Nanak. The two never met in person but their thoughts overlapped. Both were advocates of Monism, endorsed selfless service and rejected the caste system.

One of Bhagat Sain's verse is inscribed in the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture. In it, he expresses his devotional fervor and gratitude towards the all-pervading Provider.

ma(n)galaa har ma(n)galaa ||
nit ma(n)gal raajaa raam rai ko ||
madhan moorat bhai taar gobi(n)dhe ||
sain bhanai bhaj paramaana(n)dhe ||
ma(n)galaa har ma(n)galaa ||
(Raag Dhanasri, Bhagat Sain)

The eternal song of supreme bliss.
Every day the song of joy is dedicated to the Divine energy.
The fascinating attributes of my fearless self have ferried me across the worldly ocean.
Sain says, contemplate on supreme bliss.
The eternal song of supreme bliss.
(Raag Dhanasri, Bhagat Sain)

Bhagat Sain finds supreme joy in unconditional service which is his form of worshipping the Divine.

From Sultanpur Lodhi, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled further north-west and crossing the River Beas, reached Patti.

After having made a detour to Sohal Thatti, we resume our journey in the footsteps of Guru Nanak from Sultanpur Lodhi to Patti.

A historical town located on the Indo-Pak border in the Majha region of the Indian state of Punjab, Patti was once a centre of power and affluence. Hiuen Tsiang, the 7th century Chinese traveller mentions this city in his accounts.

At Patti, observing farmers ploughing their fields, Guru Nanak engaged in conversation, asking how they cultivate their soul to reap the harvest of solace. A farmer requested Guru Nanak to guide them. In response, Guru Nanak sang,

eih tan dharatee beej karamaa karo salil aapaau saari(n)gapaanee ||
man kirasaan har ridhai ja(n)mai lai iau paavas padh nirabaanee ||
kaahe garabas mooRe maiaa ||
pit suto sagal kaalatr maataa tere hoh na a(n)t sakhaiaa ||
(Sri Raag, Guru Nanak)

Make this body the field and plant the seed of good actions. Irrigate it with thoughts of Omnipresence.

Make the mind a cultivator to grow unity. In this way, you can attain salvation.

O ignorant one, why are you so proud of your possessions?
Father, children, spouse, mother, and all relatives will not accompany when life ends.
(Sri Raag, Guru Nanak)

The process of cultivating crops is akin to paving the path to spirituality. A farmer, steeped with faith in generating a healthy produce, digs deep within the earth; seeds it with wisdom and nourishes it with compassion. Guru Nanak gives the metaphor of farming to motivate individuals to imbibe a similar attitude, to live a meaningful life.

From Patti, we make a detour from Guru Nanak's footsteps to visit the nearby memorial of Baba Sheikh Brahm at the Indo-Pak border in Khem Karan.

ganj-e-shakkar key ladley ||
bigari meri bana hi dey ||
mar mar key jee raha hu(n) mei ||
jeena mujhey sikha hi dey ||
baba fareed aaya mei mangta teri gali mei ||

The beloved of Ganj-e-Shakkar (Baba Farid).
Sort my negativities.
I am living by dying every moment in negativities.
Grace me with the wisdom to live.
Baba Farid, I, the beggar, have come to your lane.

Baba Sheikh Brahm, also known as Sheikh Ibrahim, was the 12th successor of Baba Sheikh Farid's spiritual seat.

Amardeep Singh: This is the mausoleum of Pir Baba Sheikh Brahm, whom Guru Nanak had met at Pakpattan.

Guru Nanak had spent time with Baba Sheikh Brahm at Pakpattan when he visited Baba Sheikh Farid's shrine on two occasions, during his first and the third odysseys. It is through their association that Guru Nanak collated the verses of Baba Sheikh Farid, which were later enshrined in the 'Guru Granth Sahib', the Sikh scripture. As a successor of Baba Sheikh Farid's spiritual seat, Baba Sheikh Brahm had spent his life at Pakpattan and passed on in East Punjab, the region which is now in India.

The Radcliffe line demarcating the Partition of 1947 decided the fate of two historic places. The birth and resting place of Guru Nanak, became a part of Pakistan and the resting place of Sheikh Brahm a part of India, depriving access to devotees of the respective faiths. Baba Sheikh Brahm's tomb is maintained primarily by the Sikh and the Hindu community of Khem Karan. Located on the Zero line this site is opened once a week, permitting access to Indian nationals. It is emotional to watch Pakistani devotees handing

over their offerings to Pakistani Rangers who pass them over the border fence to the Indian Border Security Force officers.

From Patti, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana travelled to Ghawindi.

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

At Ghawindi, we visit the only surviving tower of a gurdwara which is said to have been built in the memory of Guru Nanak's visit to this region.

In the book 'Gur Tirath Sangrah' written in 1884 by Tara Singh Narotam, he mentions the historical gurdwara in Ghawindi.

The Partition of 1947 divided the Indian subcontinent into two sovereign nations, India and Pakistan. This religion based division decreased Guru Nanak's followers in Pakistan which resulted in the dilapidation of many erstwhile sites built in Guru Nanak's memory.

The elderly of the village Ghawindi informed us that a 'sarovar', a water pond, had existed next to this Gurdwara building. It has now dried up and the land is being used for farming.

From Ghawindi, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana passed through Jahman village.

Trailing Guru Nanak's footsteps, we visit Gurdwara Rori Sahib at Jahman village which is close to the Indo-Pak border in Pakistan.

Bhai Wadhawa Singh built this Gurdwara Rori Sahib in the village Jahman.

The noted writer, Kahan Singh Nabha mentions in 'Mahan Kosh' that during their visit to Jahman, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana had spiritual interactions with Bhai Naria of the Bhabra Jain community of this village. Captivated by Guru Nanak's philosophy, some members of the Bhabra community became his adherents.

Rori Sahib Gurdwara, at Jahman, before the Partition of 1947 was a frequented shrine with large tracks of land where community fairs were held twice a year. The gurdwara is now deserted and the once huge 'sarovar', the water pond has dried up. The gurdwara's past grandeur can be observed from the remnants of the fresco artwork which depict inspirational moral folklore.

It is interesting that the name, Rori Sahib, of this gurdwara is the same as that of the Gurdwara Rori Sahib in Eminabad.

From Jahman village, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana visited Dera Chahal village in the Barki district.

Tracing Guru Nanak's footsteps, we visit the Dera Chahal Gurdwara in the village of Dera Chahal.

Amardeep Singh: Dera Chahal was Guru Nanak's maternal village. Bebe Nanaki, Guru Nanak's sister was born in this village. Guru Nanak would often visit Dera Chahal. This Gurdwara was built in the memory of Guru Nanak's visits and the birth of Bebe Nanaki.

It is said, from his childhood days, Guru Nanak often visited this village as it was his maternal home.

The gurdwara was abandoned after the Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. It was restored in the year 1997 with the initiative of Malik Meraj Khalid, the then acting Prime Minister of Pakistan and himself a native of Dera Chahal village.

From Dera Chahal, Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana headed to Talwandi, their home town, which is now known as Nankana Sahib.

In Guru Nanak's footsteps, we travel from Dera Chahal to Nankana Sahib.

Guru Nanak and Bhai Mardana were returning to Talwandi after having travelled for approximately twelve years. The 'Pehli Udasi', the first journey to the East and the South, which started in 1504 AD, is estimated to have concluded in the year 1516 AD, when Guru Nanak was about 47 years of age.

Bhai Mardana proceeded to visit his family and Guru Nanak met his family, who were delighted to hear about his accomplishments.

Having spent time at Talwandi, Guru Nanak was now planning to embark on another odyssey to the North. Bhai Mardana, a true companion, consented to remain a vital part of Guru Nanak's next physical and spiritual journey.

We perceive reality according to our mind's understanding, allowing it to control our actions. Guru Nanak says, if we conquer our self then we can win over the entire world.

aaiee pa(n)thee sagal jamaatee man jeetai jag jeet ||
(Jap, Guru Nanak)

See the universal fellowship as the highest order of wisdom. If the mind is conquered
then the world is conquered.
(Jap, Guru Nanak)

Discussion Pointers

ALLEGORY: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels Episode 17: Noor-e-Tawheed (Light of Oneness)

The presented discussion points serve as a compelling framework for delving into Guru Nanak's historical journey and profound philosophical legacy, which are explored in this episode. By examining his extensive travels across northern India and interactions with diverse spiritual traditions, we learn how Guru Nanak's experiential wisdom flourished through dialogue and engagement with different religious communities. The philosophical questions highlight Guru Nanak's distinctive insights on self-introspection, divine understanding, ethical action, and spiritual practice that challenged the prevailing religious orthodoxies of his time. These inquiries provoke critical thought about how Guru Nanak's approach transcended mere ritualism, caste divisions, and dogmatism, advocating for a path grounded in mindfulness, balance, and universal love. Guru Nanak created a spiritual outlook that is profoundly relevant across cultural and religious landscapes by focusing on the transformation of consciousness through self-mastery rather than external religious performances. The discussion points challenge us to explore further how his transformative twelve-year journey (1504-1516 AD) laid the groundwork for a philosophy that inspires impactful dialogue and spiritual exploration in our contemporary world.

Historical Discussion Pointers:

1. What was the geographical scope of Guru Nanak's first journey as documented in the text?

The episode traces Guru Nanak's extensive travels from Chittorgarh northwards through Ajmer, Pushkar, Mathura, Delhi, Panipat, Takhtupura, Sultanpur Lodhi, Patti, Ghawindi, Jahman, Dera Chahal, and finally reaching Nankana Sahib. This first odyssey, called 'Pehli Udasi', spanning approximately twelve years from 1504 AD to 1516 AD, covered major religious and cultural centres across northern India. How might this extensive travel have shaped Guru Nanak's inclusive philosophy and understanding of different faith traditions?

2. How did Guru Nanak engage with diverse religious figures during his journey?

The episode details Guru Nanak's interactions with followers of various spiritual traditions, including the disciples of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, Vaishnavite pilgrims at the Keshav Deva Temple in Mathura, Shaivite natives at the Yamuna ghats, and Sufi saints like Sheikh Tahir in Panipat. What do these diverse interactions reveal about Guru Nanak's approach to interfaith dialogue and his method of conveying his thoughts through responsive discourse rather than preaching?

3. What was the significance of Sufi connections in Guru Nanak's journey?

The episode highlights Guru Nanak's meaningful encounters with Sufi traditions, particularly at Ajmer's shrine of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, at Majnu Ka Tilla in Delhi, where he met Fakir Abdullah, and at Panipat, where he conversed with Sheikh Tahir. Additionally, it mentions the important connection with Baba Sheikh Brahm, the 12th successor of Baba Sheikh Farid, which led to the inclusion of Sheikh Farid's verses in the Guru Granth Sahib. How did these Sufi connections influence Guru Nanak's spiritual outlook and contribute to the inclusive nature of his philosophy?

4. How has the Partition of 1947 affected the historical sites associated with Guru Nanak?

The episode poignantly describes how the Radcliffe line dividing India and Pakistan separated many sites dedicated to Guru Nanak's life and journey. It notes that the Partition of 1947 divided the Indian subcontinent into two sovereign nations, India and Pakistan. The division based on religion led to a decline in the number of Guru Nanak's followers in Pakistan, resulting in the deterioration of many sites established in his memory. Locations such as the Gurdwara in Ghawindi, Rori Sahib at Jahman, and Dera Chahal fell into disrepair following the Partition. Some of these sites were only restored several decades later. How does this political division impact our understanding and preservation of Guru Nanak's legacy today?

5. What was the nature of Guru Nanak's relationship with his family and friends?

The episode reveals that Guru Nanak visited Sultanpur Lodhi, where he reunited with his sister, Bebe Nanaki, after years of travel. It also mentions that Dera Chahal was Guru Nanak's maternal village, and that he had frequently visited this place since childhood. Before his travels, he had served as a 'Modi' (an officer at the State granary) in Sultanpur Lodhi and visited the city again during his travels. How did these personal connections and early life experiences influence Guru Nanak's spiritual journey?

Philosophical Discussion Pointers:

1. How does Guru Nanak's concept of prayer and spiritual practice differ from ritualistic observances?

When questioned by the disciples of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti about the Islamic obligation of performing five daily prayers, Guru Nanak responded with a verse highlighting that true spiritual practice goes beyond mere rituals. He stated that while one may pray five times a day, read scriptures, and partake in food and drink, all of these actions will ultimately cease when faced with the inevitability of death. Guru Nanak emphasized that prayers should inspire the mind to seek a deeper understanding beyond the mundane activities of life. Mere ritualistic recitation holds no value unless it is accompanied by a profound understanding of the Oneness that transcends biases related to gender, religion, and social status. How does this perspective challenge conventional religious practices across traditions?

2. What is Guru Nanak's understanding of divinity as reflected in his spiritual messages?

When asked about the physical attributes of the Divine in Sultanpur Lodhi, Guru Nanak responded with a verse that conveyed that if the Divine were tangible, it would be visible. Its form and status are not something we can see. The cosmic energy carries out all deeds and resides in the hearts of both the high and the low. Describing it is not easy in words. However, Guru Nanak emphasizes the connection between 'Nirgun,' representing the invisible attributes, and 'Sargun,' representing the visible attributes. This concept implies that divinity is fundamentally formless yet has form pervading in all. How does this non-dualistic understanding of divinity compare with other religious conceptions of God?

3. How does Guru Nanak address the relationship between charity and justice?

When asked in Delhi about the importance of charity and whether giving alms generously constitutes true nobility, Guru Nanak challenged this notion. He explained that thoughtless actions can lead the mind to be influenced by negative thoughts and that an ignorant mind can hinder one's abilities. He illustrated this concept by comparing it to covering a fragile structure with mud, which would ultimately cause it to break. This episode highlights the misconception that injustice can be offset simply by performing charitable acts. Guru Nanak stated that for those who harbor discrimination, their seemingly noble deeds are like a dam that cannot withstand the force of raging floods. How does this spiritual insight apply to contemporary philanthropic efforts that might overlook systemic injustice?

4. What is the significance of Guru Nanak's comparison between agriculture and spiritual development as a metaphor?

In Patti, when farmers sought guidance from Guru Nanak on cultivating their souls, he shared a profound metaphor. He advised them to see their bodies as fields where they could plant the seeds of good actions. They should water these seeds with thoughts of Omnipresence and let their minds act as cultivators that nurture unity. By doing so, they could achieve salvation. Guru Nanak emphasized that just as the cultivation of crops requires dedication and faith, so does the spiritual journey. A farmer, motivated by the hope of a fruitful harvest, digs deep within the soil, sows seeds of wisdom, and nourishes them with compassion. This approach illustrates that nurturing our inner selves is similar to tending to the land. How does this metaphor provide a practical framework for spiritual growth that transcends religious boundaries?

5. How does Guru Nanak's concept of 'Sehaj' provide a pathway to spiritual realization?

In response to Vaishnavite pilgrims in Mathura who asked about methods for divine union, Guru Nanak introduced the concept of 'Sehaj': The union that is acquired through intuitive stillness. Thereafter, there is no suffering of transmigration. 'Sehaj' is a combination of mindfulness, equipoise, universal love and acceptance of the law of nature, and can be an effective way to unite with the omnipresent force. How does

this holistic approach to spirituality differ from prescribed religious practices and offer a more integrative path to self-realization?

6. What does Guru Nanak's message on conquering the mind reveal about his approach to spiritual transformation?

The episode concludes with Guru Nanak's powerful message, which encourages us to view universal fellowship as the highest form of wisdom. He emphasizes that if we conquer our minds, we can conquer the world. This insight highlights that spiritual victory comes through self-mastery rather than external conquests. Our mind's understanding shapes our perception of reality and influences our actions. Guru Nanak states that if we can conquer ourselves, we can ultimately win over the world. How does this inward-focused approach to transformation contrast with socio-religious movements that emphasize external change?