

THE EARLY GURUS

Guru Nanak was born in a Punjab village in 1469 and died in the Punjab in 1539. His period is thus clearly established as likewise is the geographical area within which he delivered much of his message. There are in fact lengthy biographies of Nanak which give in great detail accounts of his early life, followed by periods of extensive travels and finally by his settling down in his own village. Unfortunately these accounts cannot be trusted as historical sources, relying as they do for almost all their information on the extensive hagiographies known as *janam-sākhis* or 'birth evidences'.

Janam-sakhis and the life of Guru Nanak

In his numerous hymns Guru Nanak himself tells us very little concerning the events of his life, and the information which can be ascertained from reliable sources amounts to only the barest outline. This includes the names of his relatives, the village in which he was born, the town where he was employed as a young adult, and the village in which he died. The various *janam-sakhis* relate lengthy narratives of his journeys in India and beyond, but apart from the fact that he did spend several years travelling, there is virtually nothing that can be affirmed concerning this period of his life.

It would be unfair, however, to disregard the *janam-sakhis* without at least a brief treatment. The entire corpus has been analysed and very little in them will stand up as historical fact, but simply to ignore them would be to dismiss a sizeable portion of the Sikh tradition and consequently a significant influence on the later development of the community (the Panth). *Janam-sakhis* consist of collections of anecdotes about Nanak, and although the earliest extant collection is dated 1658 CE, it seems reasonable to suppose that anecdotes had been

circulating ever since Nanak's own time. This means that Sikhs of every period since then have been brought up on these popular stories about the first Guru. The anecdotes, moreover, are not tales suitable only for children. Janam-sakhi accounts remain throughout a person's life and any attempt to question them will be met with resolute disapproval.

The anecdotes contained in janam-sakhi collections may be impossible for a historian to accept, but the historian assuredly does not speak for the Panth as a whole. As far as the Panth is concerned, the janam-sakhis are reliable and woe betide the person who dares to question them. These anecdotes, moreover, embody ideals and give expression to approved behaviour. As such they are indeed acceptable to the vast majority of Sikhs and have exercised a marked influence upon successive generations of the Panth.¹

The janam-sakhis are grouped in several clusters or families, each of which orders its chosen anecdotes in a sequence corresponding to Nanak's life story. Two of these clusters are dominant. Until the late nineteenth century the *Bālā* collection controlled the field, a group of janam-sakhis which had as the Guru's regular travel companion a certain Bhai Bala. During the later nineteenth century the *Bālā* janam-sakhis created growing unease among educated Sikhs, as these collections specialize in jumbled sequences and quaint miracle stories. In 1872, however, another version was discovered which certainly had its fair share of miracles but related them more soberly and did so in the context of a more ordered sequence. This was the *Purāṭan* tradition. Since its discovery *Purāṭan* has provided the framework for the more sophisticated biographies of Nanak, leaving *Bālā* in control of the popular market. The story which the janam-sakhis tell is as follows.

Nanak was born a Hindu in the Punjabi village of Talvandi, west of Lahore. His birth and childhood were marked by manifest signs of divine approval, such as the heavenly host which gathered to greet his arrival into the world. When he grew to maturity he was married and had two sons. As a young man he joined his sister's husband in the town of Sultanpur (near the confluence of the Beas and Satluj rivers) and there took employment with the local lord. It was while he was in Sultanpur that he had the religious experience that led him to set out on his journeys to preach his divine message. There is no

agreement concerning itinerary in the janam-sakhis, but the modern accounts in English normally follow the *Purāṭan* pattern, so that is the order followed in the remainder of this summary.

According to the janam-sakhis of the *Purāṭan* tradition, Nanak made four expeditions outside the Punjab, one to each of the four cardinal points of the compass. On all these journeys he was accompanied by his faithful minstrel, the Muslim Mardana. First he travelled eastward, ending up in what modern commentators identify as Assam. Returning to the Punjab he then visited the south as far as Sri Lanka. Next came a journey to the north that led him through Kashmir and up the slopes of the mythical Mount Sumeru, which the commentators say was Mount Kailash. Finally he travelled westward and visited the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina.

After his four lengthy journeys he settled in the Punjab at a spot on the Ravi river above Lahore. Here the new village of Kartarpur was built. Nanak remained there preaching his message and blessing those who came to visit him. In 1539 (or 1538 if we follow the *Purāṭan* janam-sakhis) he died in Kartarpur and possession of his body was disputed by Hindu and Muslim devotees. Upon the cloth which covered it being raised, only flowers were discovered. These were divided, the Hindus taking their share for burning and the Muslims theirs for burial.

Within this framework all manner of anecdote is contained, various authors including or withholding them in accordance with the length of their biographies and their susceptibilities concerning the miraculous. One popular anecdote from Nanak's childhood is the story entitled 'The Ruined Crop Restored'.

Like other village boys Baba Nanak² went to graze the buffaloes in the morning and having done so he brought them home at dusk. One day he left the buffaloes unattended and fell asleep at the edge of a wheat field. While he slept the buffaloes trampled the crop and ate the wheat.

When the crop of wheat had been demolished its owner appeared and cried, 'Why have you ruined my field? Explain this outrage!' 'Nothing of yours has been ruined, brother,' replied Baba Nanak. 'What harm is there in a buffalo putting down its head to graze? God will make it a blessing.'

The owner was not pacified and began to argue with Baba Nanak. Quarrelling all the way, Baba Nanak and the man who owned the field went together to Rai Bular, who was the headman of Talvandi. When he had heard the owner's complaint the headman commanded that Kalu, Nanak's father, should be brought.

They summoned Kalu and Rai Bular said to him, 'Kalu, rebuke this son of yours, for he has ruined another man's field. You have let him remain simple-minded. Make restitution for this damage to another's property or you will appear before the Turks.'³

'What can I do?' replied Kalu. 'He wanders around like a crazed fool.'

'I pardon your offence, Kalu,' said Rai Bular, 'but you must make restitution for the damage.'

Then Baba Nanak spoke. 'Nothing has been ruined,' he said. 'He is not telling the truth.'

'Everything in my field has been ruined!' exclaimed the owner of the field. 'I have been robbed! Give me justice or else I shall have him summoned before the Turks.'

'Not a blade of grass has been eaten nor even broken,' said Baba Nanak. 'Send your man to see.'

Rai Bular sent his messenger and what should the messenger discover when he went to inspect the field? He found that not one plant had been harmed! He returned and said, 'Nothing has been harmed.' Hearing this, Rai Bular declared the owner of the field to be a liar, and Baba Nanak and Kalu both returned home.⁴

It seems somewhat hard on the unfortunate owner of the crop to be declared a liar, but we miss the point if we focus on details. The anecdote is simply concerned to show the protective hand of Akal Purakh (God) hovering over the child Nanak. Details about other people are unimportant. The same protective hand is also evident in two other anecdotes concerning divine protection for the sleeping child. One of these relates how a tree's shadow remains stationary while Nanak sleeps under it, and in the other a cobra shields him from the sun by distending its hood. The latter example, which is present also in Buddhist tradition, indicates one of the sources from which anecdotes were derived.

Another popular anecdote relates how Nanak, while approaching

Multan on his travels, was greeted by a cup brimful of milk which the local Muslims had sent out to deter him from entering the city. The message was clear. Multan already had all the religious preachers it could hold. Nanak's reply was to lay a jasmine petal on the milk and send it back unspilled, signifying that there was room in the city for the noblest message of all. This anecdote was borrowed from Sufi sources. It was first related concerning 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani's approach to Baghdad and was then repeated twice concerning other Sufis of Multan.

Another anecdote is the story of Lalo and Bhago. On his travels Nanak chose to stay in Eminabad at the humble home of the low-caste Lalo. Word soon spread that he had arrived and a wealthy high-caste person called Bhago demanded to know why Nanak had chosen such a lowly abode when he would have been pleased to offer much grander accommodation. In reply Nanak asked Bhago to send a portion of his rich fare. Taking some of it in one hand and Lalo's vegetable cake in the other, he squeezed both. From Lalo's cake issued milk whereas from Bhago's food there oozed blood.

The story-telling appeal provides one of the two reasons for the immense popularity of these anecdotes and the message communicated by them provides the other. Concern for the sleeping child demonstrates Akal Purakh's care for the chosen messenger. The jasmine petal illustrates the supreme truth and beauty of all that he teaches. And the story of Lalo and Bhago confirms his championing of the low-caste poor against the wealthy and arrogant high caste. The janam-sakhi stories may not have actually happened, but they do serve to enshrine the message that later generations of Sikhs took from the teachings of Nanak.

The janam-sakhis also point to various features of the early Panth. In this respect they testify to later periods than that of Guru Nanak himself, though it is still the early Panth that is represented. One such feature is the Nanak-panthis' somewhat ingenuous understanding of Nanak's key doctrine of the *nām* and of its practical expression in the discipline of *nām simaran*.⁵ A common variety of anecdote records how Baba Nanak visited a particular place during his travels, converted the people by means of a miracle or wise pronouncement, and then proceeded on his way. These references make it clear that *nām simaran*

was understood as a mechanical repetition of the single word 'Guru'. This, it may be argued, is a part of the total range covered by the concept of *nām simaran*, but plainly it lacks the sophistication of Nanak's own understanding.

Another feature of this standard conclusion to janam-sakhi anecdotes concerns the *dharamsālā*, a room for devotional singing. In every house, we are told, there was established a *dharamsala*. In other words, each house became a place where devout Sikhs would gather to sing the Guru's hymns. The twin concepts of *sāṅgat* (congregation) and *kīrtan* (hymn-singing) are thus emphasized in the janam-sakhis as a regular feature of the corporate life of the Nanak-panth. Elsewhere in the janam-sakhis we encounter a reference to indicate that the *dharamsala* was one of the features which conferred a distinctive identity on the Nanak-panth. Sikhs of Guru Nanak can be distinguished from adherents of other panths because they possess their own special place of worship.

The janam-sakhis are thus of considerable value. They do not provide much in the way of narrowly historical fact, but they do testify to the impact which Nanak's teachings made upon his early Sikhs and they demonstrate also how some of those teachings were worked out in the life of the early Nanak-panth. When, for example, the Nanak of the janam-sakhis utters the pregnant maxim *nā koī hindū hai nā koī musulmān* ('There is no Hindu; there is no Muslim'), the words may not actually be those of the historic Guru but the interpretation of the saying is consonant with his teachings and has been implicitly believed by generations of Sikhs ever since it was first circulated.⁶ Likewise, the description of a childless couple, gathered with a congregation and praying to Baba Nanak for the gift of a son, provides an authentic picture of the Panth at a later stage in its development.⁷

The image of Nanak to emerge from the janam-sakhis is still very much the image which accompanies the Panth to the present day. For ordinary Sikhs calendar art or the bazaar poster is a particularly important decoration for their houses or places of business. No illustration of the Gurus is as popular as the one which shows an elderly Baba Nanak with patchwork garments and a supremely benign expression, eyes half closed in meditation and his hand raised in blessing. This is very much the Nanak that the Sikhs remember.

The early Nanak-panth: a religious community

When Guru Nanak died in 1539 how large was the community of his followers? The traditional accounts of his last years refer to a rapidly growing community of many Sikhs who responded with enthusiasm to his teachings. How do we know that it had become a large one? We may think it quite unbelievable that Guru Nanak could ever have attracted few disciples, but in fact we have little to go on other than the traditional sources. It is true that the janam-sakhis claim that he attracted large crowds from far and near, and that as his fame increased so too did the host of pilgrims coming to his village for his blessing. But that is the way with the hagiographic janam-sakhis, as with all such writings from almost any religious group. Their authors would certainly be unable to imagine one, blessed by Akal Purakh in such a special way, ever attracting only a small number of disciples. It would have to be a very large figure.

We are therefore left with a problem when we are required to estimate the number of disciples Nanak attracted to Kartarpur. That he did attract some is quite beyond question, for otherwise how was Lahina (the future Guru Angad) called to be a Sikh? But was it a large number or was it a small one or was it somewhere in between? We are unable to answer other than on the grounds of assumption. We assume that because Nanak's teachings were later seen to be successful among the rural people of the Punjab, it follows that they were successful from the very beginning, and that consequently he attracted many rural people to his centre in Kartarpur during his lifetime.

This would be natural enough. A teacher earns a reputation for great piety and for communicating the message of divine liberation. The word spreads around the neighbouring villages and even those further away, and soon the people are coming for *darshan*.⁸ They come expecting blessing, and having received it they depart. It is all quite natural and believable, and doubtless it is true.

What is not based on assumption is the nature of the Panth that was thus formed. What was the message that Nanak so insistently preached, the doctrine that was at the heart of all he said in the works he has left? The message which Nanak preached, in different styles

and in endless variety, was love of the divine Name. The divine Name is the way to spiritual liberation, freely open to all.

Burn sensual craving, make ink with its ashes; as paper prepare heart and mind.

Take love as your pen and with reason the scribe enquire of the Guru and list his commands.

Write on that paper the Name with your praises; write of the infinite power!

Refrain: This is the record to learn how to write;

This is the record by which we are judged.

Where fame is conferred in the presence sublime, where glory and rapture abound,

They who have treasured your Name in their hearts bear the marks of your grace on their brows.

For grace is the means to obtaining the Name; all other is bluster and wind.

One may appear and another depart, each with his dignified title and name.

One may be born to beg food and his clothing, another to rule with renown.

Each as he passes shall surely discover that lacking the Name he is doomed.

In dread of your majesty, awesomely grand, my body must waste and decay.

They who were known as the lords of creation have withered and crumbled to dust.

Our ties with this transient world must dissolve when we rise and proceed on our way.⁹

It was, in other words, an explicitly religious message and the people who acknowledged him as Guru did so for religious reasons. The Panth was therefore a religious organization. Liberated by the divine Name, each person owed the freedom from superstition and empty ritual to the man to whom they now looked up as spiritual guide and leader. Others

owed him the same debt and together they formed his body of disciples (or his Sikhs). Whether there were many or few is beside the point. This body of loyal believers constituted his Sikhs, expressing their oneness by gathering as a *satsang* (a congregation or 'fellowship of true believers') for *krītan* (hymn-singing). The body constituted the Panth, or (to be more explicit) the Nanak-panth (the society of those who acknowledged the way taught by Nanak as the means of liberation from the spiritual ills that surround us). And it was a *religious* Panth.

This point bears repeating because the Sikhs as we know them today are much more than merely a religious community. The British, in more than two centuries of ruling in India, never knew the Panth as one which was restricted to meditation and devotion. All the writings of British soldiers and administrators have taken for granted that it comprised much more. They had, after all, met this Panth in two hard-fought wars in the middle of the nineteenth century, and the troops who so vigorously opposed them were scarcely moved by the dictates of religion alone.

But we should not exaggerate this point. The Khalsa soldiers were not motivated by religion alone, but it certainly played a part in their sense of common brotherhood. The religion that bound them together was the religion of Guru Nanak, at least in origin and partly at least in substance. It was greatly supplemented by the contribution of his successors (notably by the tenth Guru), but the message of liberation through the divine Name still held sway. Even if not many Sikhs in the mid nineteenth century did anything very practical about the message, it nevertheless commanded the active allegiance of a sufficient number and it was recorded for any who chose to read it in the scriptures which commanded such veneration.

When we go back to the time of Guru Nanak that message is virtually the sole reason for the existence of the Nanak-panth; and the Nanak-panth is, accordingly, a *religious* community which bound together people who affirmed belief in Nanak's conviction of the *all-powerful, all-liberating divine Name*. This it sustained throughout the sixteenth century; and for most of the seventeenth century it retained the same character. Although it adopted a policy of active defence against adversaries under the sixth Guru, it is only with the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675¹⁰ that it begins to emerge

as a community with interests which extend further. Only with the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh does it begin the task of formalizing that change. And only with the chaos and confusion of the eighteenth century does it assume, as the Khalsa, the functions that carry it well beyond the religious definition of a community. By the end of the century the Khalsa is proclaiming the famous words *raij karega khalsa*, 'the Khalsa shall rule', and under the leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh it assumes the role of a state.

But Nanak, we must repeat, was the Master of a religious community, and it is a strictly religious community which he passed on to his chosen successor. There was nothing surprising in his decision to pass the Panth on to the guidance of a successor. This was, indeed, the regular practice for people who had attracted a body of religious followers in north India. The honour did not necessarily pass to a son, if son there was waiting for the task. Nanak had two sons (Lakhmi Das and Siri Chand), but it was by no means inevitable that they would receive the leadership from their father. As things turned out a different person was chosen.

The janam-sakhis (which disagree concerning who was the older) say or imply that the sons had become rebellious, and while we are not bound to agree with this, we are obviously required to accept that neither was chosen to succeed his father. Instead the choice alighted on Lahina, renamed by Guru Nanak as Angad, or 'the one who is as close as my own limb' (see page 17). Lakhmi Das went on to found the first of the famous *Gurū-zanis* families (families in the lineage of a Guru). Some members of this Bedi family achieved considerable importance in the Nanak-panth during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the possessors of influential *gaddis* (seats of authority). Siri Chand was attracted by the Nath yogis and tradition holds that he was the founder of the Udasi order, which practised religion in the style of the Nath¹¹. This, if true, could hardly have been in accordance with his father's wishes and in this sense he may well have been 'rebellious'.

The fellowship or body of disciples which Baba Nanak passed on to his successor obviously consisted of a community that accepted the teaching of liberation by the divine Name. The divine Name lay everywhere around and every man must seek to bring his spirit into harmony with the divine Order which the Name expressed. The same

went for every woman, and indeed people of every religion and every caste – and none. In practice the overwhelming majority was from the rural castes of the Hindus, but there was certainly nothing in the teachings to hold back Muslims from becoming devotees. Mardana, Guru Nanak's faithful companion, was one of the few Muslims to be numbered among the early Sikhs.

This practice of *nām simaran* was something which they could do by the repetition of a spiritually charged word or mantra, uttered while engaged in everyday occupations – such terms as *sal-nām* or *vāhigurū*. They were expected to gather with other like-minded people from their village as a *satsang* and sing the hymns composed by the Guru. These works embodied the message he preached, and by singing them together the people would make that message their own. At regular times (which would become more frequent as the person grew towards old age), he or she would be expected to sit and silently meditate, thereby appropriating the power of the divine Name in all its increasing wonder.

Each day the devout Sikh would be expected to visit the place set aside in memory of the Master and there pay respects in whatever manner was approved. These places were originally only the simple rooms known as dharamsalas to the early members of the Nanak-panth. Later the term *gurdwara* took over, probably towards the end of the eighteenth century.¹² On specific occasions (which would largely depend on the distance at which the believer lived) there would be a visit to the presence of the Master himself. This visit would consist of little more than *darshan* of the Guru, a passing by him and a display of humble reverence for which the reward would be the conferring of a divine blessing. It might perhaps consist of *kathā* (homily) from the Guru; and if the devotee was particularly fortunate he might be singled out for the Master's direct attention.¹³

Let it be understood that once again we are proceeding on the basis of partial inference, as the life of a believer was so very much taken for granted that it was scarcely worth recording. Our inference is the manner in which people practise *nām simaran* today, and though the practice was probably followed in much the same way four or five hundred years ago, it should remain clear that to some extent inference is our source. This is precisely where the janam-sakhis would be

reliable if only they recorded the custom more fully. References in the janam-sakhis are, however, rare and are not always reliable.

This was the kind of community which would have attached itself to Guru Nanak, acknowledging him as guide in all things that involved their spiritual welfare. There is also an opportunity to understand something of the secondary leadership of the early Nanak-panth. Bhai Gurdas, the contemporary poet, lists some of the notable followers of Nanak. Many individuals are identified by caste and predictably the one that stands out is the Khatris caste. This information is predictable because Khatris, although not numerous in the villages of the Punjab, were prominent as leaders in the rural situation.¹⁴

The ordinary members must be left to the glimpses obtained from the janam-sakhis, supplemented by references in the *Dabistān-i-Mazhib*. This fragmentary information fits well with the later picture of the Panth, as indeed with the impression which any well-informed person would have concerning village life in the Punjab. A large majority of Sikhs today belong to the Jat caste and it seems reasonable to suppose that the Panth attracted the Jats from the very beginning.¹⁵ The Jats were certainly attracted to the Nanak-panth in large numbers at some stage, and their position in Punjabi rural society makes the process entirely reasonable. On the one hand these were people rated low in the *varna* or 'classical' hierarchy because they dirtied their hands by cultivating the soil. On the other, these were also the people who in many instances were the dominant caste in their villages and who would be searching for a legitimizing explanation for their growing power. What could be more welcome than a message informing its hearers that there was no need to show favouritism to the Brahmins for liberation was freely open to all? This would indeed be welcome to the Jats and at some early stage they responded to it.

Apart from these two castes it is difficult to be sure about the constituency of the Panth which gathered around Guru Nanak. It presumably contained a relatively small range of castes, with Khatris elevated in terms of leadership and Jats in terms of numbers. This was the Nanak-panth which passed from its founder on to his successor. Just what numbers belonged to it at this early stage would be impossible to say. In the Punjab of its time it would be regarded as one among many panths, with its founder the focus of devotion for those who

chose to make him so. And it would be regarded as a Hindu panth, though this cannot be drawn with any clarity. Lines are never easy to draw clearly in the Punjab villages at this time or for several centuries to come, and the adherence of a small number of Muslims would make the task even more difficult.

Guru Angad

As we step from the time of Nanak to that of his early successors a sense of relative assurance deserts us. There are two general problems which confront us. First, we have nothing like the wealth of source material which confronted us in the case of Nanak. The janam-sakhis may have their considerable problems, but they do at least provide us with something on which to work. Secondly, few scholarly writers have attempted to use what meagre material exists in order to deliver acceptable lives of the successor Gurus. It is true that Macauliffe has provided extended biographies of all the Gurus in his six-volume work entitled *The Sikh Religion: Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors*. In 1893 Max Arthur Macauliffe resigned his appointment with the Indian Civil Service and devoted himself entirely to the literature of the Sikhs, publishing his *magnum opus* in 1909. Ever since its publication this work has retained a pre-eminent reputation among the Sikhs. This, however, is largely because Macauliffe's account is strictly traditional, reflecting faithfully the views of the radical Tat Khalsa section of the Singh Sabha movement.¹⁶ It is not history as a historian would understand the term.

The successor to whom Baba Nanak passed on the Nanak-panth was Lahina, subsequently renamed Angad. It is by the latter name that he is known as the second Guru of the Nanak-panth, occupying the position from the death of the first Master in 1539 until his own death twelve and a half years later in 1552. It is quite clear that he inherited a religious group and it is equally clear that it could be defined as much the same Panth when he passed it on to his successor, Guru Amar Das. Guru Angad lived a relatively quiet life in his chosen village of Khadur. This seems clear enough. What is much harder to determine with any certainty is the manner of life lived by the Guru in his village and the truth of the various incidents related of him during this period.

There are several of these anecdotes, though they are very few when compared with the copious supply regarding his predecessor. One of the janam-sakhi traditions, it is true, shows a particular interest in him and was in fact a tradition which probably took shape in Khadur. This is the *Mahimā Prakāśh* tradition, both in its prose form and in its very different poetic version. Both were composed in the middle of the eighteenth century and for that reason alone are to be trusted only as the voice of tradition. Apart from the fleeting *Adi Granth* references, with a repetition and slight supplement from *Bhai Gurdas*, the janam-sakhis (particularly the varying accounts of the two versions of the *Mahimā Prakāśh*) provide us with practically all our information concerning *Guru Angad*. During the nineteenth century *Santokh Singh* used these sources, supplemented by oral tradition, to produce in *Staraj Prakāśh* the standard traditional life of *Guru Angad*.

As with *Guru Nanak's* works in the *Adi Granth*, those of *Angad* offer little significant comment concerning his life story. One feature which is evident from his compositions is a particular fondness for the early-morning bath as the prelude to devotion, but the glimpses of his way of life are very difficult to interpret unless we use the janam-sakhis as a guide. This is scarcely surprising. In addition to the nature of these compositions (they too emphasize the religious quality of the *Guru's* thought), there is the fact that they are brief and very few in number. Some basic detail is, however, available in an *Adi Granth* panegyric written by two followers of the *Gurus*. This stresses the choice of *Angad* as *Baba Nanak's* successor and the unsuccessful protest directed against his decision by the sons of *Guru Nanak*.

In other respects the *Adi Granth* communicates relatively little information concerning the life of *Angad*. The principal source for his life is in fact the janam-sakhi material which deals with him in conjunction with *Baba Nanak*. We have already been sufficiently warned of the reliability of the janam-sakhis as sources of biography. With this in mind we shall again approach the janam-sakhis, treating them with due caution. Some elements can be accepted as reliable (such as the details concerning his family relationships), but others must be regarded as at least unproven. On this basis we can extract the following account of the life of *Guru Angad*.

Lahina (or later *Angad*) was the son of *Pheru*, a *Khatri* of the

Trichan sub-caste. His ancestral home was located near the village of *Matte di Sarai* in *Firozpur District*. Later tradition gives his date of birth as corresponding to 31 March 1504. He was married to *Khivi*, the daughter of a *Khatri* from *Khadur village*, and two sons and at least one daughter were born to them. The two sons, *Dasu* and *Data*, are represented by the *Mahimā Prakāśh Kāvītā* as delinquents, whereas *Amro* the daughter (in contrast to her brothers) was distinguished by her piety and obedience. According to tradition it was through overhearing her singing a *shabad* that the third *Guru*, *Amar Das*, was led to *Guru Angad* and so to conversion.

Probably in his late twenties *Lahina* was converted by the preaching of *Guru Nanak*, and for the remainder of his Master's lifetime he resided partly in *Kartarpur* and partly in *Khadur*. At some stage *Guru Nanak* bestowed the name *Angad* on him to signify that the disciple had become as much a part of him as his own limbs (*ang*). This implied a special status for *Lahina*, a position confirmed when he was formally designated successor as *Guru* shortly before the death of *Nanak*.

Bhai Lahina thus became *Guru Angad* when *Guru Nanak* died in 1539. The succession was evidently disputed by the two sons of *Guru Nanak* and it was possibly for this reason that *Angad* abandoned *Kartarpur* to take up permanent residence in *Khadur*. For almost the entire period he appears to have remained in *Khadur*, receiving his Sikhs and imparting instruction to them. A feature of this period was evidently the free distribution of food to people of all castes, and tradition relates that in this respect he was ably assisted by his wife, *Khivi*. His death took place on a date corresponding to 29 March 1552, *Amar Das* having been appointed to succeed him as the third *Guru* of the *Nanak-panth*.

In these broad terms it is possible to sketch a generally reliable account of the *Guru's* life, though tradition has to be admitted as the source for several of the items. Tradition becomes the sole source for the various anecdotes which are related by the janam-sakhis concerning *Guru Angad*. The fact that tradition is by no means necessarily correct is pointed up by the fact that two differing accounts exist for a story so important as *Lahina's* conversion.

One of them (reported in the *Purāṭan* tradition) relates that *Lahina* was the *pūjārī* (temple officiant) of *Khadur* and that as all the people save one were worshippers of the goddess *Devi*, that was the cult to

which Lahina also belonged. On one occasion Lahina overheard the one exception (who was a Sikh) singing a hymn of Guru Nanak. Further conversation with the Sikh convinced Lahina of the truth of the Guru's words, and casting aside the trappings of Durga-worship he too became a Sikh.

The other tradition (related in other janam-sakhis) tells of how Lahina, in common with other pilgrims from the village of Matte di Sarai, made an annual pilgrimage to a 'shrine of Durgā', which the *Mahimā Prakāśh Kāvītā* later identifies as Jwalamukhi. On one such pilgrimage the party happened to pass by Kartarpur, and hearing that it was the abode of Baba Nanak they decided to visit the village in order to have his *darshan*. While they were in his presence, Baba Nanak briefly conversed with Lahina, who was instantly converted. In spite of the protests of the pilgrim party which he was leading, he announced that the purpose of the pilgrimage had been fulfilled in Kartarpur and that he would proceed no further.

Here we have two traditions and we must guess which is correct, decide that neither is to be trusted, or conflate the two in the manner of Santokh Singh's *Nānak Prakāśh*. Santokh Singh's version provides the standard modern account, still generally accepted although it did not appear until 1823.

All the other janam-sakhi stories stress the loyal, unquestioning obedience of Lahina to his Master, earning for him the ultimate selection as his Master's successor. Perhaps the most famous anecdote of all is the one which tells how the succession issue was finally settled. In order to test the loyalty of his followers, Baba Nanak once escorted them to a wilderness where he made silver and gold coins appear before them. Many of his Sikhs immediately disqualified themselves by seizing all they could grasp. Further on, most of those who remained eliminated themselves by picking up jewels which in like manner magically appeared on the road before them. Only two Sikhs now remained, one of them Lahina. Guru Nanak led them to a funeral pyre and commanded them to eat the corpse which lay on it, concealed by a shroud. The other Sikh fled but Lahina, obedient to the uttermost, lifted the shroud to do his Master's bidding. Under it he discovered no corpse but Baba Nanak himself. The incident had been devised in order to test his Sikhs and Bhai Lahina alone had passed.

For generations of Sikhs this story has testified to Angad's devoted obedience to Guru Nanak, fulfilling his every wish as a welcome command. The Nanak-panth was a religious community and if its second Guru should have been distinguished for his humility and obedience these are qualities that we should expect to find in it. Unfortunately it is not a meaning that we can draw out of the principal anecdote concerning his time as Guru, related by the *Mahimā Prakāśh* tradition. The second Mughal emperor, Humayun, called on Guru Angad while fleeing northwards from the victorious Afghan, Sher Shah Suri. Guru Angad was playing with children at the time, and continued playing with them, leaving his royal visitor waiting. After an hour the increasingly impatient Humayun laid his hand on his sword, whereupon, as a signal of the Guru's divine power, his hand stuck to the hilt. Angad then turned his attention to him. His hand, he said, would have been better applied to his sword when fighting against Sher Shah Suri than as a means of making a faqir hurry. Humayun apologized and was assured that he would recover his kingdom. Had he not laid his hand on his sword, he was told, he would have received it back immediately. Now, however, he would have to endure an exile before it would be restored to him.

This story no historian could possibly accept, illustrating as it does the powerful hold which the pious imagination exercises. It is absolutely inevitable that such stories should grow and flourish, yet however attractive they may be, the historian will derive no meaning from them other than that future generations regarded the Guru with the profoundest respect and veneration.

There is one last tradition concerning Guru Angad which should be briefly considered. It is commonly believed that Guru Angad invented the Gurmukhi script (the script in which Punjabi is written). This conviction is a comparatively late development, for the earlier sources do not make such a sweeping claim. The script is very like that used by the traders of the Punjab and it would be perfectly natural for Guru Angad (a Khatri by caste) also to write in it. Because it thus communicated the Guru's utterances, it came to be known as Gurmukhi ('from the Guru's mouth').

The Panth which Guru Angad had received from Guru Nanak he passed on to his successor, the third Guru, Amar Das, essentially

unchanged. He had received a Panth which consisted of members who were bound directly to their Guru by ties of personal allegiance, and it was such a Panth which he transmitted to Amar Das a dozen years later. It was a religious Panth with a very loose structure holding it together. The headquarters of the Panth travelled with the Guru, and where he was located there was its centre to be found. Each of its members had made a personal decision to belong to it, and this they expressed by a regular visit to their Guru to pay their respects and seek his blessing. He was their Guru and he would still recognize them when they came from neighbouring villages and towns for his *darshan*.

The Sikhs observed no festivals peculiar to their panthic allegiance, nor did they follow any distinctive practices which marked them off from their fellow Punjabis. In all respects they were the same as people in the same situation in Punjabi society, save only for their chosen allegiance to one who taught them a particular doctrine of liberation from the cycle of transmigration. In pursuing this doctrine they were instructed to meditate on the divine Name, an inward pilgrimage easy to understand, which needed no external assistance. For people with such a belief there was no particular value in attending the village temple, and likewise they could regard the ceremonies of the Brahman as altogether useless. In practice, they presumably still continued to observe these traditional ceremonies, apart from the minority who had made a firm commitment to the new way. They were counselled to rise early and after bathing to meditate on the wonders of the divine Name, for it was by appropriating those wonders that the way of liberation opened before them. This too would be observed with differing degrees of commitment, the truly loyal observing it with rigour and the lax doing so on occasion.

The numbers who belonged to the new Nanak-panth are as impossible to determine as those who belonged to it in Nanak's own day. Probably it would still be fairly small, but there is absolutely no way of telling. That it was still a religious Panth is beyond question. Its members would be seen as people making a personal response to teachings concerning the way of spiritual liberation. Beyond this distinction and the caste distribution in the Panth there would be nothing to separate them from the other Hindu villagers of the Punjab.

THE DEVELOPING PANTH

Under the third Guru changes started to occur. The Panth no longer consisted exclusively of those who had made a personal commitment, their place being occupied increasingly by those who had been born into the faith and had known it since infancy. Changes were increasingly needed if the Panth was to retain the freshness and vigour of its founding days. This was the situation which faced the third Sikh Guru, Amar Das.

Guru Amar Das

Amar Das was born in the village of Basarke, near modern Amritsar. His father was Tej Bhan, a Khatri of the Bhalla sub-caste. The daughter of Guru Angad was married into the family of one of his brothers and it was in this manner that Amar Das came to be acquainted with the works of Baba Nanak. Evidently the family lived in Basarke, partly on agriculture and partly on trade in grains. Because his date of birth is disputed, Guru Amar Das's age at his succession to the office of Guru must remain uncertain, but it was obviously an advanced age (probably seventy-three). He held the position for the remarkably long period of twenty-two years, eventually dying in 1574 at the age (probably) of ninety-five.

This sequence enables us to set the third Guru in the context of his family and of his times. The Guru was married and he thus continued the pattern of married Gurus as a feature of the Nanak-panth. It was, in other words, a Panth which taught liberation without going to the extent of demanding asceticism, either from its leaders or from its members. The life of the married householder was affirmed, not that of the celibate ascetic. He had two sons, Mohan and Mohari, whom tradition casts in the usual filial role of opponents of their father's

choice of a successor. There was also at least one daughter and probably two. The daughter who is certain, Bibi Bhani, was married to Jetha Sodhi, who as Guru Ram Das became his father-in-law's successor.¹

Tradition records that Amar Das was instructed by Guru Angad to take up residence in the new village of Goindval, thereby converting it into a place of safety and sanctity. A new village had been founded by a Khatri called Gobind a short distance down the Beas river from Khadur. Gobind was unable to persuade others to stay in it, however, for what was erected each day was mysteriously dismantled that same night. Guru Angad disclaimed the right to have the village named after him and also to go and live there, but he commanded Amar Das to take up residence in it. The building then went ahead steadily and the village was able to progress. Called Gobindval after its founder, the village's name was later shortened to Goindval. The tradition is certainly accurate to the extent that Amar Das took up residence in Goindval and made it the new centre of the Nanak-panth.

This was the period when the Nanak-panth, having passed the first flush of enthusiasm, was in process of consolidation. The earliest Sikhs had been brought into the new Panth by means of a message directly preached and directly accepted. This generation was, however, passing and in its place a new one was growing up, one born into the faith rather than having accepted it personally. It was a generation which required a structure to its faith and it needed certain high points to observe. Some Sikhs will have been converted in the manner of their parents, but others will always have known the Panth as a part of their background and will have grown up accepting it as the path to follow. The informal organization of Nanak-panthis gathering in *sangats* to sing *kīrtan* and coming to visit their Guru was no longer sufficient.

The appearance of later generations owing their adherence to birth rather than to personal choice imposed one variety of strain on a movement of this kind. Growing numbers imposed another, particularly when there was a simultaneous expansion in geographical terms. There is considerable uncertainty with regard to the timing of the measures taken by Nanak's early successors, and indeed the actual measures themselves are not always clear. It seems, however, that significant steps were taken during the period of Guru Amar Das,

and that the developments encouraged by these steps established the pattern of panthic organization which was to persist until the founding of the Khalsa at the end of the seventeenth century. The picture is obscure to say the least, but it is to this phase that the indications point, and certainly the period of the third incumbent would be a natural time for panthic organization to take a more definite shape.

The uncertainty associated with these developments should be stressed if we are to appreciate the shadowy nature of much that passes for historical fact during the period of the early Gurus. Measures that are traditionally associated with the period of Guru Amar Das and which are viewed as the product of formal decisions may actually have longer pedigrees and less specific origins. Tradition is, however, reasonably firm on most of these points, and although our detailed understanding may be faulty, the eventual results seem beyond doubt. In these guarded terms we may attribute to Guru Amar Das three distinct varieties of innovation.

One innovation can be regarded as essentially administrative. As the Panth expanded, new *sangats*, or 'congregations', came into existence. Immediate contact with the Guru became increasingly difficult to maintain and it thus became necessary to appoint deputies authorized to act on his behalf as preachers. Guru Amar Das is traditionally credited with having established the *matijī* system of supervision, and the later *masand* system is believed to have developed from this prototype. The function of the *matijīs* seems to have been exclusively preaching the message of *nām simaran*.²

A second innovation which is usually attributed to the third Guru concerns the institutionalizing of a key doctrine. Guru Nanak had made it abundantly clear that caste status (like all exterior conventions) could have no bearing on access to the divine Name and thus to the means of liberation. It was probably Guru Amar Das who borrowed from the Sufis the practice of compulsory commensality or eating together, thereby giving practical expression to the first Guru's ideal. In the Sikh tradition this inter-dining convention emerged as a specific form of the *laīgar* (almshouse or public kitchen). In Sikh usage the *laīgar* comprises the kitchen and refectory attached to every gurdwara in which food is prepared and served to all regardless of caste or creed. This convention requires men and women of all castes to sit in

status-free lines (*paṛigat*) and eat together when they assemble on the sacred ground of the dharamsala or gurdwara. Guru Nanak and Guru Angad certainly maintained *laṅgars*, but the specifically anti-caste character appears to have been an introduction by Guru Amar Das.

The third variety of innovation comprises a cluster of decisions (conscious or implicit) which concerned the developing ritual of the Panth. Whereas the *laṅgar* plainly matched the intention of Guru Nanak, the new practices, together supplying a distinctive panthic ritual, might well seem to be in conflict with it. The first Guru had stressed the interior nature of devotion, dismissing as false and dangerous the kind of external ritual associated with conventional Hindu tradition or orthodox Islam. Decisions attributed to the third Guru may look suspiciously like the kind of thing that Nanak abandoned and roundly condemned. They include the digging of a sacred well (*bāoli*) in the Guru's village of Goindval to serve as a place of pilgrimage for Sikhs. They also include the introduction of particular festival days and the compiling of a collection which was later to become a sacred scripture. Guru Amar Das is also credited with the decision to excavate the sacred pool that marked the founding of Amritsar.

Would Nanak, with his strong emphasis on interiority, have permitted this to occur? There are two answers that can be given to the problem thus presented. The theological answer is that the Guru is one and that decisions made by the third Guru proceed from precisely the same source as attitudes expressed by the first. This answer implies the second response, which is that changed circumstances require fresh decisions. No one is likely to be surprised by this development. A growing and maturing Panth could never have sustained the informality of the first Guru's practice. The formalizing of the tradition occurs in the period when one would expect it and in much the manner that might be anticipated.

A recording of the sacred songs of the Gurus would also have been acceptable in the time of the third Guru. Adherents of the Nanak-panth, as we have already noted, gathered regularly in *saṅgats* or *satsaṅgs* to sing *kīrtan*, and this was their principal means of learning and reinforcing the Guru's teachings concerning the divine Name. The chances of spurious hymns penetrating such *satsaṅgs* was obviously very considerable and

it would have been a natural decision for the third Guru to make, one that produced a manuscript recording only that which was authentic.³ This would ensure that the *bānī* sung by Nanak-panthis would be only *kachit bānī* or 'true' hymns. All possibility of *kachit bānī* ('non-authentic *bānī*') would be eliminated. The possibility of *kachit bānī* finding acceptance is illustrated by the janam-sakhi quotations of the works of Baba Nanak. Virtually all their quotations differ in some degree from the text recorded in the *Adi Granth*. One does not need the presence of rivals to account for misreadings of the sacred text.

The Nanak-panth Guru Amar Das handed on to his successor was therefore the same as he had received, yet there were changes taking place that indicated something of the direction which it would follow. It was still a religious Panth, preaching the message Guru Nanak had taught. Guru Amar Das, through his hymns, repeated the same doctrine of liberation through the divine Name. His followers gathered in *satsaṅgs* to sing the message over and over again in hymns of expanding variety. There is no way of determining the size of his following (no more at this time than there was in the time of Guru Nanak), but it seems safe to assume that it was still the same constituency. Jats dominated it numerically, Khatri were still prominent in positions of leadership. Such at least seems to be a reasonable conclusion. Clearly the Panth was continuing in the manner Guru Nanak had left it and clearly it was the same Nanak-panth.

But it was a Panth that was changing, a Panth that was coming to grips with a later stage in its development. No longer does it consist solely of converts, of those who had made the choice themselves to accept the message preached by Nanak. Now the Sikhs have a pilgrimage centre, and to that centre, Goindval, they are expected to go to have *darshan* of the Guru. This, for Sikhs, is to be the *thrall* or place of pilgrimage. Two festival days have been designated for the purpose, and a regular feature of such a visit will be to descend to the well so recently dug. In their dharamsalas, or when visiting Goindval, the Nanak-panthis are not to observe caste. They do, however, preserve caste as a marriage convention and their links with the wider Hindu community are thus preserved unbroken. The Panth is still the fellowship which Guru Nanak had left. The time for radical change has not yet come.