

## Guru Angad Dev: 1504 – 1552

A son was born to Pheru Mal and Daya Kumari (a pious lady) on 31 March 1504 at Matte-di Sarai, in Ferozpur District, in Northern India. He was named Lehna. His father (a Khatri by caste) ran a small business making ropes. Lehna moved to a village called Khadur in District Amritsar after Babar invaded India. In 1519 he married Kheevi daughter of Devi Chand. The couple was blessed with four children, two sons (Datu and Dasu) and two daughters (Amro and Anokhi).

Lehna was a devotee of goddess Durga. He made annual pilgrimages to Jawala Mukhi temple in Kangra hills dedicated to her worship. On one such trip in 1532 he decided to visit Guru Nanak who lived in the village of Kartarpur. Nanak was tending his rice fields when Lehna approached him, dressed in spotless clean clothes. To his utter surprise Nanak asked Lehna to pick up a bundle of paddy soaked in mud and carry it to a barn nearby. Without a hesitation Lehna complied with Nanak's request. Guru Nanak's wife (Bibi Sulakhani), protested against this shabby treatment of a gentleman who had just arrived to see him, because India's caste-ridden society did not permit a person of status to perform a menial task. Nanak replied, "The soaking bundle represents the weight of humanity and the dripping mud represents the saffron showered on him to honor him for his willingness to assume the responsibility to serve humanity," indicating that an instant bond had developed between Lehna and Guru Nanak. Bibi Sulakhani did not appreciate this reply because she wanted their elder son (Sri Chand) to succeed Guru Nanak. Lehna decided to suspend his pilgrimage and stay in Kartarpur as a dedicated disciple. At dawn he recited Guru Nanak's composition Asa di Var (which describes a pilgrim's advancement to sainthood) and served in the community kitchen later in the day. People started calling him Bhai Lehna. For seven years Guru Nanak tested Bhai Lehna's human qualities (forbearance, humility, piety, obedience, sacrifice, service, etc.) with a view to anointing him his successor in preference to his two sons. Some stories are described below.

- Once a mouse died where Guru Nanak used to sit in his house filling it with a foul stench. Normally, a lower caste person would be summoned to dispose off the carcass. Guru Nanak requested his sons to do the job. They refused! Thereupon, he looked at Bhai Lehna who did the job without any hesitation.

- At one time Guru Nanak's bronze bathing cup fell into a foul smelling sewer. Guru Nanak asked his sons to fetch it. They refused and asked their father to buy a new one. Bhai Lehna jumped into the sewer and brought the cup out.

- On a very cold night, Guru Nanak asked his sons to go to a nearby stream and wash a few dirty clothes for him. They said that it was the job of a washer man not theirs. Upon hearing this, Bhai Lehna proceeded to carry out Guru Nanak's wish forthwith.

- On a stormy night an adobe wall of the house crumbled. Guru Nanak wanted it rebuilt forthwith. His sons refused saying that they should wait until morning when the laborers would arrive to do the necessary repairs. But Bhai Lehna had no such qualms, he set about rebuilding the wall.

- Once Guru Nanak pretended to become a crazy person! He wandered around the cremation ground scaring his disciples. He came to a place where a white sheet was spread, supposedly covering a corpse. Guru Nanak ordered his disciples to eat it! They thought Guru Nanak had gone mad and left him, leaving only Bhai Lehna who asked

Nanak whether he should start from the foot or the head of the corpse. When the sheet was removed, there was no dead body but a heap of karah parshad (a wheat pudding) and Bhai Lehna started eating it. Guru Nanak embraced Bhai Lehna affectionately and said, "From today onwards you are my inseparable limb (Ang)." Guru Nanak's sons were unhappy when they learned their father had decided to anoint Bhai Lehna his successor.

Lehna became known as Guru Angad at Guru Nanak's passing on 7 September 1539. He returned to his village Khadur to start his ministry. During thirteen years of his mentorship, the fledgling Sikh faith grew with discipline and highest norms of personal conduct. Guru Angad lived on his meager income from the family business and enjoined on his sons (Datu and Dasu) to use their own honest earnings for personal maintenance. He standardized the Punjabi alphabet; it came to be known as Gurmukhi. Guru Angad recorded Guru Nanak's compositions and the hymns of other saints collected by Guru Nanak in the Gurmukhi script. He employed two muslim bards (Satta and Balwand) to do Gurbani kirtan at early dawn and continued the tradition of Langar (community kitchen) started by Guru Nanak, serving full meals to the needy, handicapped, and downtrodden, supervised by his wife (Bibi Kheevi). He introduced the tradition of wrestling and other forms of physical exercises among the Sikhs. One of his last acts was to advise Goinda, a wealthy disciple, to set up a village near Khadur on the bank of river Beas; it is known as Goindwal today. It came to be that Mughal Emperor Humayun defeated by Sher Shah Suri retreated northward into Panjab and passed by Goindwal on his way to Lahore. He heard about Guru Angad and decided to seek his blessings. Humayun visited Guru Angad at Khadur who was watching a wrestling bout and did not notice Humayun's presence for a while. The Emperor felt insulted and drew his sword. Guru Angad turned to him, smiled and said to him calmly, "Where was your sword when you faced Sher Shah Suri? Now you brandish it to subdue a fakir." Humayun apologized for his impatience and asked for Guru's forgiveness and blessings.

Like Guru Nanak, Guru Angad found his two sons lacking the qualities to succeed him. So, he chose Amar Das the father-in-law of his daughter Amro instead. Amar Das, himself a devotee of the goddesses before he met Guru Angad, endeared himself to the Guru by a devoted service to him and his Sikhs for six years; he used to fetch water from river Beas at dawn to bathe Guru Angad. Amar Das became the third Sikh Guru in 1552 when he was 73 years old.

Sixty-two of Guru Angad's hymns are included in Shri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS), some form a part of Asa di Var, sung at early dawn in Sikh Gurudwaras.

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**Some thoughts preached by Guru Angad Dev**

Why call them blind, whom nature has robbed of sight; they who have not discovered the Divine will, says Nanak are truly blind.

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A union of bodies is no union, however close it be, It is only when souls meet can we speak of a true union.

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A beggar today would be king; every blockhead sets up as a pundit; a blind man would be a connoisseur of gems; that is the modern way of describing things. A bad man sets up as a spiritual leader; a liar is judged a perfect man, so it is in this (iron) age! Nanak says, even so, the Guru can teach us how to choose among men.

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