CHAPTER - III

BRIEF LIFE SKETCH OF GURU NANAK DEV

Milieu:

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh faith (1469-1538) lived at a time which can be described as the dark period in history. It was an age of anarchy, corruption, favouritism and nepotism, good deal of hate and strife existed between different castes, creeds and sects which existed amongst Hindus as well as Muslims. The country was divided into small provincial kingdoms which often quarrelled amongst themselves. Small kingdoms were creating terror. In the words of Dr. Jodh Singh:

"The rulers lacked humanitarian outlook and hardly ever cared to come out of their harem to listen to the agonised grievances of the public. As this was not enough, the occasional inversion of outsiders put the people of the West India in many unwarranted miseries and hardships."

3.1 BIRTH:

Guru Nanak was born at Talwandi, a village on the bank of Ravi, later known as Nankana Sahib, now in
Pakistan, situated 65 kilometres south-west of Lahore, in a Bedi Kshatriya family on the 15th April, 1469 A.D. His father was Kalyan Chand Bedi popularly known as Mehta Kalu and his mother was Tripta.

3.2 EARLY CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOLING:

As he grew up, he was sent to school where he picked up elementary knowledge soon and pestered his teacher to teach him true knowledge. He said to his teacher, "Teach me only this large letter of life." Tell me of the Creator and the Wonders of this great world. His teacher could not satisfy him.

36. सब वहें विश्व विषय समस्या ||
   किस जन रण गुरुध्वि जापन ||
   (सच्ची उपनिषद्, दक्षिणी प्रताप 7, अनुवाद जय चौहाण)

Hear, O Pandit, why writest thou the worldly puzzles?
By Guru's grace, write thou only the Name of the Lord, the Cherisher of the world.

(Dakhni Oankar, Ram Kali Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 930).
37. O Sire pandit, instruct thou me.
What is the way, by which I can
attain unto the Lord of Life?

(Basant Hindol Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 1171).

38. If thou art the literate and wise Brahman,
then make thou the boat of the two,
only two letters of God.
Prays Nanak, if thou art merged
in the true Name, the One Lord
shall ferry thee across.

(Basant Hindol Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 1171).

He took little interest in conventional studies and spent more
and more time in contemplation. He left the school feeling
dissatisfied and wandered in thirst for true knowledge. His
soul was attuned to the celestial music vibrating in it. For
hours he would sit thus enjoying the beauties of nature and
on unbroken communion with the Creator and His beauties.

His father tried to impart formal education to him
but he was more inclined towards the True Education. D.N.
Khosla (1982) is of the view:

"Whether he was at the village 'Pathshala' or at
'Makatib', whether he was with the Sanskrit
teacher or with the Persian or Arabic teacher,
he would amaze them all by asking question
far beyond his years. The one aim he seems
to have in his mind was; Who is truly learned?
Certainly not one who knows the letters of the alphabet, but he who arrives at true understanding through these. And at his teacher's failure to see beyond the physical forms of letters, who would by his deep erudition, compare extempore acrostics to reveal the hidden imports of each alphabets.
In fact, he would compose poems giving critical reflection on everything tickled his sensitive imagination. His deep philosophical mood, his penetrating vision, tried again and again to give life and meaning to every thing that seemed lifeless to others. He was very keen and curious to learn more and more and, deeper and deeper but was never satisfied with it."

Khosla further says:

"No wonder then that Nanak exhausted the whole expouse of learning available in his village soon. He learnt Hindi, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic among other subjects taught at 'Pathshala' and 'Makatib' at schools attached to mosques and temples and at private schools at the residence of priests, maulvies and other education-processes."

According to Hari Ram Gupta (1973), Nanak also learned Arithmetic and Accountancy in Lande Mahajani from a Brahanman teacher.

Surjit Singh Gandhi (1978) is of the view that Nanak often met the learned people in the forests and discussed metaphysical problems with them.

Baffled by this unusual behaviour of their son, Nanak's
parents sent for a physician to heal him. When the physician put his finger on the pulse of Nanak, the boy’s voice which had been silent for days, came thrilling with a new and unsurpassed sweetness:

39. The physician is sent for to prescribe a remedy.
Seizing my arm, he feels the pulse.
The simpleton physician knows not, that the pain is in the mind.

(Var Malar, Slok Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 1279).

During early childhood period Nanak used to melt on seeing miseries. The author of Nanak Parkash records instances of his carrying away from home articles of diet and clothing and bestowing them on the needy. He started talking of divine subjects at the tender age of five. Instead of taking part in childish games, he invented new games involving a realisation of the presence of God and instructed his companions to practice them. He used to engage himself in the game of silence. He tended cattle also for sometime. From early childhood period, his sister saw in him the Light of God. To her, he was a dream of God’s beauty descended on earth - a miracle of God’s Grace sent to mankind. Mathura Bhat says:

40. ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇ ਜੀ ਸੁਗੜ ਮੋਹੀਨੀ ਕਰਮਚਾਰੀ ॥
(ਗੋਰਾਥਾ, ਆਧੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਦੀ ਭਵਨ ਸੋਅਣ ੧੪੦੮)

God, the Embodiment of Light, has caused Himself to be called Guru Nanak.

(Sorathe, Adi Granth page 1408).
3.3 HIS STAY AT SULTANPUR:

To divert his attention and to enable him to learn some business, Nanak's father - Mehta Kalu sent him to Bibi Nanaki (sister of Nanak) at Sultanpur. Her husband Shri Jai Ram, who was holding a high position, got him appointed in the service of the local Muslim Governor. He was put in charge of the granary (modikhana) of the Governor.

To involve him further in worldly life Bibi Nanaki got her brother married. No doubt, Nanak carried on his household duties honestly, yet his mind was always elsewhere. He would distribute most of his earnings among the poor and the needy. There are a number of incidents, happenings, encounters and experiences of his early life which stand testimony of his greatness and the lifelong mission he undertook.

3.4 FAMILY LIFE AND SERVICES:

Nanak was married at the age of fourteen to Sulakhani, the daughter of Mool Chand, a resident of Batala. He got two sons, Sri Chand and Lakhmi Das. But the married life made no difference to Nanak, so far his meditation was concerned.

The sister of Nanak, elder in age, Nanaki took him to Sultanpur Lodhi, near Kapurthala where she was residing and through her husband Shri Jai Ram got him appointed in the Modikhana (i.e. government store of provisions) as a storekeeper. Nanak as a modi (store-keeper) did his duty honestly but he used to
distribute his earnings among the poor and the needy and called it a true business - 'Sacha Sauda'.

3.5 PERIOD OF SOUL AWAKENING:

He did not like traditional schooling. So he asked his teacher to give him true knowledge. From the beginning he had a contemplative mind. He always felt very happy in the company of saints, both Hindu and Muslim. He did not believe in superstitions. He also disliked his father's profession. He wanted to serve humanity as a devotee and a faithful disciple of God. He was not at all interested in earning money like other people. He always distributed his earnings among the poor and the needy. This period of his life from 1469 to 1496 may be called "the period of soul awakening and enlightenment."

Only those do the real service, who being contented, meditate on God, the truest of the true. The place not their foot in sin, do good deeds and practise piety. They burn (break) the worldly bonds and live on paltry corn and water.

(Var Asa, Mahalla 1, Pauri Adi Granth pages 466-467).

3.6 PERIOD OF GAINING EXPERIENCE OF OTHER RELIGIONS:

The period from 1496 to 1521 was the period of gaining experience of other religions and sharing of his own views with them. He travelled far and wide and propagated his message of love, selfless service and honest living. And the period from 1522 to 1539 was the period of retired life. This was the
time when he laid the foundations of Sikhism. He always wished the welfare of all (Sarbat da Bhala). He met holy persons of great learning with whom he discussed the basic truths of various religions.

42. From flesh we are conceived, from flesh we are born and we are the vessels of flesh.
O Pandit, thou knowest not Divine knowledge and Lord's meditation and still thou callest thyself wise.

Flesh is allowed in the Puranas, flesh is allowed in the Muslim religious books and flesh has been used in the four ages.
Flesh adorns sacred feasts and marriage functions, with them flesh is associated.

O Pandit, thou understandest not thyself, but thou instructest people. Thou art indeed very wise.
O Brahman thou knowest not, whence flesh has sprung.

(Var Malar, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 129).

43. The fools call themselves scholars and with devices and cavils, they love to amass wealth.

(Var Asa, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 469).

44. To be called a Muslim is difficult.
If one be really so, then he may get himself called a Muslim.
First he ought to deem sweet the
religion of the Lord's devotees
and have his pride of pelf effaced
as rasped with a scraper.
(Var Majh, Slok Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 141).

45. Some are Jains, who wander in
wilderness. They are wasted away
by the Primal Being.
In their mouth is not the Lord's
Name and they bathe not at the
place of pilgrimage.
They pluck their head-hair with
their hands and shave not their
heads.
They remain filthy day and night,
and love not the Lord's Name.
(Var Malar, Mahalla 1, Pauri, Adi Granth page 1285).

46. With the sacrificial mark on the brow
and on his waist the ochre-coloured
loin-cloth.
In his hand he holds the knife he is
verily the world butcher.
Wearing blue clothes, he becomes acceptable
(in the eyes of Muslims). Taking bread
from the Muslims he worships Puranas.
He eats the he-goat killed by uttering
the foreign (Muslim Kalima) words.
He allows none to enter his cooking
enclosure.
(Var Asa, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 472).

47. उदा युगल मुखिया घरी !
निरंत युगल करात समयी !
भूल नृत चितायत साठी !
(कर नासा नासा मंदिर मूलौ, सायर 9, पैरेस ग्राउंथर 870, नॉट 1942)
You read books, say vesper prayers
and argue, you worship stones and
sit in trance like a crane.
With your mouth you utter falsehood
like precious ornaments.

(Var Asa and Slok Sahaskriti, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 470
and 1353).

3.7. SOME INTERESTING HAPPENINGS OF HIS LIFE:

There are many interesting happenings of his life. Like
everybody's parents, Guru Nanak's father also wished him well
set in life in one vocation or the other. Once Nanak was told
to do farming but he kept mum. On being asked again, Nanak said,
"In my body's farm the mind is the ploughman, right conduct
the cultivation, humanity the watering of it, God's essence
the seed, contentment the harrow, and poverty the fence. Tended
by love, this seed will sprout, and fill the granaries of
those who'll act thus 0 father, riches do not go along with
us when we depart from here though they have lured the whole
world. But few there are who understand this truth."

48. Doing deeds of love, the seed shall
germinate and flourishing then thou
shalt see such a home.
0 Sire, wealth goes not with the
man.
This mammon has bewitched the world
and some rare person understands
this.

(Sorath Mahalla 1, Ghar 1, Adi Granth Page 595).

Nanak continued: "0 father I'll grow so much in my farm
that it will be sufficient not only for me and my family but also
the whole world. After one had eaten out of my hands, he would crave no more. It will settle the accounts of every one, whether these be of this birth or of previous ones. And the Man for whom I till my land, whose tenant I am, He protects me from drought and from floods and whatever I ask, and whenever he gives so much that I entered: Enough, no more.”

3.8 TRAVELS (UDASIS):

To give his message of peace, love, selfless service, honest living, truth, purity, integrity, vision of one humanity which transcended over caste, creed, race and religion and that there is only one God; Guru Nanak left his service in 1496 and set on tours initially with two disciples, Bala—a Hindu and Mardana—a Muslim. He undertook four great journeys. He travelled far and wide over mountains, on plains, in deserts, through jungles as well as at waters etc.

(i) First Udasi (1496 to 1509):

Guru Nanak went to the east to visit holy places of Hinduism upto Bengal, Assam, Sikkim, Tibet, China, Burma, Jawa and Sumatra. He undertook this journey from Sultanpur, Karnal, Delhi, Mathura, Agra, Itawa, Kanpur, Lucknow, Alahabad, Varanasi, Patna, Gaya, Bhagalpur, Dhoibri, Gowhati, Bolaghat, Kohima, Shillong, Imphal, Silchar, Silhat, Chandpur, Burma, Kotaraja (Sumatra), Kuala Lumpur, Nanking, Darca, Faridpur, Krishnanagar, Dum Dum, Vardhman, Cuttack, Puri, Kurka, Soragarh, Jabalpur, Panna, Bhopal, Dholpur, Bharatpur, Jind, Talwandi and came to Sultanpur.
(ii) Second Udasi (1510-1515):

Guru Nanak went to the south as far as Ceylon. He visited holy places of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. He had his way to this Udasi from Sultanpur and went from place to place as Malerkotla, Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Pushkar, Ajmer, Athwar, Devagarh, Abu, Eadar, Ujjain, Indore, Aurangabad, Amravati, Akola, Hingoli, Nanded, Bidar, Haidabad, Vijaywara, Gantur, Anantpur, Korrapa, Tirupathi, Madras, Arkot, Pondicheri, Tanjore, Nagapatnam, Trichnapalli, Rameshwarm, Anuradhapur, Tirukomali, Baticloa, Cape Comrin (Kanya Kumari), Palaynkottai, Madurai, Cochin, Palghat, Calicut, Mysore, Bangalore, Dharwar, Rajapur, Pune, Bombay, Surat, Som Nath, Junagarh, Dwarka, Okha, Mundra, Amarkot, Ahmedpur, Mithunkot, Pakpattan, Lahore, Talwandi and rejoined Sultanpur.

(iii) Third Udasi (1515-1517):

The third Udasi of Guru Nanak was towards North. He visited places of Kashmir and Himalayas. He concerned his journey from Kartarpur, Hardwar, Nainital, Nanak Matta, Ayudhya, Kathmandu, Tamlaung, Lhasa, Lake Man Sarower, Kailash, Leh, Khotan, Yarkand, Tashkand, Khokand, Gilgit, Amar Nath, Srinagar, Vaishnu Devi, Jammu, Batala and ended this Udasi at Kartarpur.

(iv) Fourth Udasi (1517-1521):

Guru Nanak travelled in the West. He visited many Muslim places of worship in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Arabia, Mecca, Madina and Baghdad.
He started this Udasi from Kartarpur and ran through Sialkot, Asmalkhan, Dera Ghazikhan (Chunia), Shikarpur, Rohri, Larkana, Amarkot, Karachi, Adan, Jaiman, Mecca, Jadda, Madina, Jordan, Damascus, Kairo, Nile river (Egypt), Habash Desh, Rome, Aleppo, Baghdad, Isphahan, Tehran, Baku, Mashahad (through Caspian Sea), Pawarijam, Bukhara, Samarkand, Balkh, Kabul, Jalalabad, Peshawar, Jamrodpur, Kalu Bagh and concluded the same at Kartarpur.

During all his journeys he adopted peculiar methods to give his own teachings to the various people.

Guru Nanak spoke against oppression, exploitation, superstititions, illiteracy, religious bigotry and spread the message of "Welfare of all" (Sarbat da bhala). He envisaged a casteless and classless society based on the principle of equality, brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God – Akalpurkh. He tried to dispel the ignorance not only from the Indian society but also helped the total human society to awake, throw away the shackles of mental and physical slavery and become aware of its human worth.

49. The blind fools are without wisdom and blind is their understanding. Nanak, they who are bereft of the Lord's grace, obtain not honour ever.

(Var Suhi, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 789).

50. Why worship goddesses and gods O brother; What can one ask from them and what can they give him?
The stone gods are washed with water, 0 brother, but they themselves sink in water.
(Sorath Mahalla 1, Dotuki, Adi Granth, page 637).

Through the love of another, he gropes through darkness.
(Slok Varan Te Vaidhik, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 1412).

52. The meteor has arisen. How can the Lord be seen with the eye?
The True Guru shows the Lord to the perfectly fortunate slave of his.
(Tukhari Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 1110).

53. 

Sovereignty, wealth, beauty, high caste and youth are the five robbers.
These robbers have robbed the world and they have not spared anyone's honour.
(Var Malar, Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 1288).

54. 

Nanak says that men are men only in shape and name.
(Asa Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 350).

3.9 LAST PHASE OF LIFE:

In the last phase of his worldly life, Guru Nanak settled at Kartarpur (at the bank of river Ravi). He used to hold
prayers, religious discourses and discussions. He lived with his children and led the life of a householder. Guru Nanak told the people that they could worship the God, while doing their household jobs. They need not run to solitary places for this purpose. He proclaimed that everybody was required to earn his livelihood by fair means and hard work.  

55. आम आगे छिद ने जटाह बंद रही वह सारिख हो जाय की भद्रकाल ||
      हिंसा उबल जाती वि सहित ठला लगती हैं दुःखभी मे जहर ||
      (जुबादी सप्तह ५, अग्नि चौथ नवर १२२६)

He, who is the Lord of hope, surrendering it to Him, this man remains detached.

Whosoever worships Him, from whom he has sprung, O Nanak, approved is he, be he he a householder or a renouncer.

(Prabhati Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 1329).

56. चारी सारिख चंदन जिया आसे आन नहीं,||
      फिरा अगर चंदन नहीं चंदन चंदन एक रही ||
      (चंदन निती वर, नवर मार्ग ७, अग्नि शुद्ध भुज्यं १२५९)

The gifts are of the Master. How can one contend with Him?

Some whilst awake receive them not and others He awakens from sleep and gives.

(Var Sri Rag, Slok Mahalla 1, Adi Granth page 83).

He called upon his followers to observe the following five principles in life:

(1) Nam (i.e. praying, reciting, reading, writing, saying and singing praises of God).

(2) Dan (i.e. charity for all or the needy).
(iii) Ishnan (i.e. daily bath to keep the body clean).
(iv) Sewa (i.e. service of humanity).
(v) Simran (i.e. constant repeating of Gur-mantra, Med-mantra and hymns with full attention through prayers for the deliverance of the soul).

Guru Nanak called upon humanity to worship one God, to live virtuously and to be tolerant - of the feelings of others. 57

What can poor Nanak say?
All the men praise but the One Lord
Nanak places his head on the feet of such persons.
I am a sacrifice unto Thine Names, as many as they are, O Lord
(Mahalla 1, Basant, Adi Granth page 1168).

His household paraphernalia was a school in which self love bloomed into the love for the humanity. People from all over the country flocked to the place to hear the divine message of Guru Nanak Dev. The small school set up by Guru Nanak for the children of Kartarpur received his personal attention. He taught the little ones right up to his last days.

Guru Nanak breathed his last on the 22nd September 1539 at the age of seventy.

3.10 IMPORTANT BANIS OF GURU NANAK:

Some of the important Banis of Guru Nanak are:
1. Japu ji
2. Asa Di Var
There are 974 hymns of Guru Nanak in Guru Granth Sahib in various Ragas e.g.

Japu Nishan                  Rag Bilawal
Siri Rag                     Rag Ramkali
Rag Majh                     Rag Maru
Rag Gauri                    Rag Tukhari
Rag Asa                      Rag Bhairon
Rag Gujri                    Rag Basant
Rag Bihagra (in Var only)    Rag Sarang
Rag Vadhans                  Rag Malar
Rag Sorath                   Rag Parbhati
Rag Dhanasri                 Slok Sahaskriti
Rag Tilang                   Varan Te Vadhik
Rag Suhi

Sawaiye Mahalle Pahile Ke composed by Bhats, exist in the Adi Granth, which portrays the greatness of Guru Nanak.