

GURU TEGH BAHADUR - HOLY TRAVELS TO THE EAST

JAGMOHAN SINGH GILL

It is about the time when Sikhism in east India had already established itself with a strong foot-hold. The visit and teachings of first Master Guru Nanak Dev had created deep impact among the local people. Successive Gurus were always concerned about their well-being. They were well connected with the important Sikh centres like Kartarpur Sahib, Khadur Sahib, Goindwal Sahib, and Amritsar Sahib which had emerged on the basis of needs and priorities in different phases. Various missionaries were sent to propagate the message of righteousness. Among them one of the earliest and most prominent names was Bhai Gurdas. The local Sikhs stood by the big house of the Gurus with large offerings as a mark of utmost respect. Guru Tegh Bahadur, like his predecessors, was not a stay-at-home philosopher. According to him, honesty, hard labour, a cultivated brain, and developed social qualities made an individual self-dependent and took him closer near the Almighty like so many Sikhs who led such life. Guru Tegh Bahadur's visit to the East renewed the old ties and re-established the faith as the path of truthful living. Guruji's aim was to help the suffering masses and equip them against grief with emotional and spiritual counselling. Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib set out for a long journey to the East in order to set up new preaching centres and develop the old ones in bigger forms. He garnered followers en masse and created a stir wherever he went. It is a very long and interesting topic and can hardly be written in the space of few pages.

East India, as I am going to present before you is very large. There was a common terminology for some migrant people in Punjab. I heard from my parents and the elders that six-seven decades before the arrival of migrant labourers who were part of the success story of Green Revolution, those coming from Gangetic belt beyond the Bangar' area of Punjab (now in Haryana) were called 'Poorbias'. In Sikh history, we get some such references to the large Gangetic region from Uttar Pradesh to the coasts of Bay of Bengal. The other term like Bhaiya (it is normally used for brother but now has become somewhat derogatory) came much later. My study of Poorab (east) starts with some parts of Awadh, and the Purvanchal and Vindhya-chal regions of Uttar Pradesh, covering Allahabad, Sultanpur, Azamgarh, Benaras, Mirzapur, Jaunpur (all are now divided into many districts) and the entire swathe of Uttar Pradesh bordering Bihar. Then I have covered Bihar (including Jharkhand), Bengal (including Bangladesh), Odisha and States known as the 'Seven Sisters' of the north-east with special focus on Patna Sahib, one of the earliest Takhts of Sikhs and birthplace of our tenth master Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's first tour of the East, was in 1656-57 as per references made by Bhattas before becoming Guru. These facts though not corroborated by the common sources of Sikh

history, seem to be important and cannot be ignored. So, before going to the great travels of Guru Tegh Bahadur, I want to give some details of his earlier connections, based on different scholars and Bhattas. There were two early holy tours by Guru Ji before being anointed as the Ninth Master. This will be enough evidence to prove the sacred bonding of Guru Ji with the Sikh-Sangat of entire eastern India.

Sárup Singh Kaushik, in "Guru Kian Sakhian", written in 1790AD in Sakhi no. 13 states, "following the footsteps of Guru Nanak and Guru Amar Das, Tegh Bahadur decided to go on a pilgrimage to the sacred places in the East. His mother Mata Nanaki, wife Mata Gujari, her brother Kripal Chand, Mata Hari, Suraj Mal's wife and five devoted disciples including Dyal Das, elder brother of Bhai Mani Singh and Sadhu Ram Khosla, first went to Kiratpur in June, 1656. From there they visited Kurukshetra where they stayed for a pretty long time. They were at Hardwar on the the Baisakhi day, 29 March, 1657. They lived there for several months. After attending the fair at Garh Mukteshwar in October, 1657, the entourage returned to the Punjab. The second journey to the East by Guru Tegh Bahadur was in 1660-1664. Shahd Bilas describes the second journey of Guru Tegh Bahadur to the holy places of pilgrimage. His wife Mata Gujari did not join him. With some family members and a number of disciples Guru Tegh Bahadur left home in 1660A.D. and visited Kurukshetra, Delhi, Mathura, Agra and Prayag. They were at Prayag on 19th April 1661 and at Banaras on 21 June, 1661.

The Bhat Vahi Poorbi Dakhni on 21 June, 1661, recorded their visit to Benares as follows: "Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji beta Guru Hargobindji Mahal Chhateka Banaras áye, sálsatrah saiatharan Asárh, Sudi Panchami, gail Nanak jiayi Mata Guru Tegh Bahadurjiki, Mata Harijiyistri Guru Suraj Mal Ki, Bhai Kirpal Chand áyábeta Lal Chand Subhiki ka, Bawa Dyal Das áyábeta Mai Das Jalhane ka, Gawal Das áyábeta Chhote Mal Chibber Ka, Chaupat Rae áyábeta Pera Chibbarka, Sangat áyábeta Binna Uppal ka; Sadhu Ram áyábeta Dharme Khosle ka."

[On 21 June, 1661, Banaras was visited by Guru Tegh Bahadur son of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru. He was accompanied by Mata Nanaki, mother of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Mata Hariji wife of Guru Suraj Mal, Bhai Kripal Chand son of Lal Chand Sobhiki, Bawa Dyal Das son of Mai Das Jalhana, Gawal Das son of Chhote Mal Chhibbar, Chaupat (Champat?) Rai son of Pera Chhibbar, Sangat son of Binna Uppal and Sadhu Ram son of Dharma Khosla.]

From Benares they went to Sasaram and then to Gaya. Afterwards, they came to Patna, and turned back home. They visited Banaras again and then took the road towards Prayag. It was on the way that they heard the news of the death of Guru Har Rai. They prayed for the deceased's soul at Tribeni, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati.

The Bhat VahiPurbiDakhni recorded: "Guru TeghBahadurji beta Guru Hargobind Ji Mahal Chhae, Guru Har Rae ji kiParchavnikarn Patna se âye; s'âlsatrahsaiunnis Shukla pakhMagh máskiPanchmike divas tirathPrâgraj Sangam teayepahunche, Gail Mata Nanakijiâye mahal Guru Hargobindjike; Mata Harijiâye mahal Guru Suraj Maljike; Diwan Dargaha Mal áyâ beta Dwarka Das Chhibbar ka; hor Sikh faqiraye."

[On 4 January, 1663, Guru Tegh Bahadur son of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, came from Patna to Prayag at the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati to pray for peace to the soul of Guru Har Rai (who had died on October 6, 1661). He was accompanied by Mata Hariji wife of Guru Suraj Mal, Diwan Dargaha Mal, son of Dwarka Das Chhibar, and other Sikh followers.]After visiting several notable places Tegh Bahadur reached Delhi on 21 March, 1664, according to Bhat VahiPurbiDakhni and Guru Kian Sakhian. Guru Har Krishan was already there. Tegh Bahadur met the young Guru and offered condolences to Mata Sulakhni on Guru Har Rai's death.

After the demise of Guru Har-Kishan, Guru Tegh Bahadur was appointed the Guru amidst many unwarranted activities and unreasonable situations created by some people. Guru Ji made a couple of local tours in Punjab. He wished to follow the example of Guru Nanak by visiting holy places. He was desirous of meeting the Sikhs living outside the Punjab at many places in northern and eastern India. He was keen to propagate the true essence of Sikhism and to provide succour to suffering humanity.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's most important tour to Eastern and North-Eastern India

After becoming the ninth Master Guru Tegh Bahadur undertook organized tours following the footprints of the greatest the great, Guru Nanak. This was to concretize the faith and path of truth propagated earlier by Guru Nanak in this entire region. Guru Tegh Bahadur had received a Divine call from God Almighty to visit the East of India and to preach the Gospel of Truth. This tour of Guru Tegh Bahadur is referred to by every Sikh and non-Sikh historians. This journey was full of activity which most of them recorded. The basic reason for establishing such personal contacts was to create confidence in and infuse enthusiasm among the people and to give them moral and spiritual courage. The Sangats all around were anxious to meet their beloved Guru Ji. The curiosity of their waiting anxiously is beautifully described by BawaSaroop Das Bhalla-

"PoorabDeshSangatSakalÂtMân DarshanAbhlaâkh,

Dur Desh Durgam Sthaân Jaân Pratigya Raakh"

Guru Tegh Bahadur left Punjab on November 22, 1665 (ref Bhat Vahi Jadobansian, Khata Barthian). He was accompanied by his mother, wife, and devoted Sikhs like Kripal Chand, Dayal Das, Mati Das, Sati Das, Gurditta and few more. He had his own tents, horses, carriages, bullocks, camels and necessary goods to meet his requirements in the journey.

Nawab Saif-ud-din of Saifabad presented the Guru a horse, a chariot, a tent, some camels and a few bullock carts. The Guru usually halted in a garden outside a village or town or on the bank of a river or stream. Most of the civilizations owe their genesis to the rivers as being its lifeline.

Before entering the eastern part of the country Guru Tegh Bahadur visited Pehowa and Kurukshetra of Bangar region, and then went to Mathura, Brindaban, Agra, Etawah, Kanpur. He preached to the people the values of hard and honest work and charity, thus weaning them away from the scourge of tobacco and other intoxicants, healing the sick and converting (exhorting sinners) to a cleaner and more wholesome way of life. It is certainly a fact to marvel at how a former warrior turned recluse again participated in public life with such zeal and dedication. No wonder, he created a stir wherever he went and gathered a large following. Wherever he went, he distributed all the offerings he received from the devout among the poor and the holy and fed the hungry from his never-failing community kitchen. Spreading the message of Almighty Guru Tegh Bahadur ji entered eastern India after visiting several places of religious interest, as Bawa Saroop Das Bhalla says about the importance of this region called Awadh-

"Ganga Jamuna Gomti Misrātañō Nimkhaâr, Sab Tirath Satgur Gaye Kina Bhagat Vihaar"

Here I intend to discuss Guru Tegh Bahadur's visit to eastern India with some glimpses of the various important and relevant places of his halt and stay, ranging from Allahabad to Dacca. This is based on the early writers like Bawa Saroop Das Bhalla of Mahima Parkash fame in the eighteenth century, Giani Santokh Singh Churamani' (author of Suraj Parkash) in the first half of nineteenth century, Giani Gian Singh (author of Twarikh Guru Khalsa) who visited these places in the second half of the nineteenth century and then noted scholars like Dr. Tirlochan Singh, Dr. Fauja Singh, G.B. Singh, Dr Ganda Singh, Hari Ram Gupta, Major Gurmukh Singh, Ved Prakash and others. The adventurous visits to these places in the 1930's by Giani Dhanna Singh Chahal of 'Cycle Yatra' fame have also been incorporated in this research.

From historical materials of the above scholars and my personal visits to most of the places repeatedly I can assume the approximate route of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji while moving eastwards and the return journey to Punjab. This was a long tour spanning about five years, partly by road and partly by river routes.

Guru Ji, along with his entourage moved from Mathura, Agra, and Kanpur and entered an old Hindu place of pilgrimage named Manakpur, on the banks of the river Ganga. From Manakpur Guru ji went to Allahabad and then to Benares. Some of scholars insist on his first going to Mirzapur and then Benares. But my assumption based on my visit and from the geographical angle, it seems that Guru Ji first visited Benares. Then he crossed the river Ganga and entered the town of Mirzapur. Then the entourage moved towards Sasaram

via Ahraura and then crossing the river Karamnasa. Then he moved to Gaya and from there to Patna via Rajgir, Nalanda and Bihar Sharif.

At Patna, Guru Ji left Mata Gujari, Mata Nanaki Ji (Guru Ji's mother) and few important Sikhs under the care of the local Sikhs and started his journey further east along the banks of the river Ganga. This tour might have been on the river route. He passed Phatua, Bakhtiarpur, Barh, Mokama, Bal-Guddar, Lakhi Serai and then halted at Munger. Through Munger, Bhagalpur, Kahalgaon, Kantnagar or Kuntal Nagar and Rajmahal Guru Ji entered Bengal and reached Malda. From Malda he moved towards Nalhati and some other places on zig-zag waterways. Throughout the year the main mode of transportation was on the riverine network. Then he went past Ji on way to Dacca where he had a long stay. Some researchers claim that Guru Ji went to Dacca through Pabna via Gopalpur and Godagiri from Malda. They might have touched Maksudabad (present Murshidabad). Making Dacca his base Guru Ji frequently visited many districts of Bengal now in Bangladesh including Chittagong, Sondip, Mymensingh, Shylet, Dohazari, Noakhali, Chandpur as well as the Jaintia Hills and Tipperah (Tripura) preaching the message of truth on the path of Guru Nanak. Then Guru Ji went to Kamrup or present day Assam in his same mission and was instrumental in reducing the prolonged tension between the Mughals and local Ahom Kings. He toured Dhubri, Rangamati, Gouripur and some other places over a period of more than two years and then returned to Dacca.

After a long stay in Dacca he went to Kolkata which was yet to develop into a full-fledged city and then to Burdwan where the Zamindar-turned-Maharaja was from Lahore and a descendant of Sangam Rai Kapur. From Burdwan Guru Ji went southwards Bishnupur, Medinipur, Contai, Jaleswar, Mayur-Bhanj, and travelling on the old trunk road of Jagannath Puri touched Bhadrak, Cuttack before reaching Puri. He might have planned to proceed farther southward towards Madras and Sri-Lanka, but the tour was shortened owing to the atrocities meted out by Aurangzeb on common people. Then Guru Ji started the return journey which was quite fast and reached Patna, crossing various rivers. The places he passed through would have been Bishnupur, Gomoh, Parasnath, Madhupur, Deoghar, and Gaya. After some time Guru Ji resumed his journey touching Arrah, Chhapra, Shahpur, Bairiya, Buxar and Ghazipur on either bank of the Ganga. From Ghazipur Guru Ji went to Nizamabad in Azamgarh, either by boat on the river Tamsa or by road. From Nizamabad Guru Ji went by road to Jaunpur and thence to Benares, from where he might have gone to Ayodhya, Lucknow, Farrukhabad, thus completing the great holy travels to east India.

Places visited by Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji- Only few places are discussed with very briefly on the basis of the above-mentioned historical documents and my continuous fieldwork for years.

Kaa-Manakpur

Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji halted at Kaa- Manakpur to bless sannyasi Maluk Das who strayed away from the right path. The place of his worship and samadhi is still visited by devotees. Earlier, there was a Sangat but now it stands totally destroyed. It was a place of natural beauty and surrounded by forests. Importance of Kaa-Manakpur in Sikh history was first highlighted in Mahima Parkash by BawaSaroop Das Bhalla while most of researchers have written about this based on Bhai Santokh Singh Churamani's Suraj Parkash of 19th

century. As Mahima Parkash is an 18th century text, my findings are based on Mahima Parkash. Thus BawaSaroop Das Bhalla writes -

Chaupai- "Pun Kae Manakpur Ka Mug Leena, Maluk Das Tahan Saadh Praveena".

In its annotation editors had gave wrong information of this place being in far of Assam. Here author writes about the place Kae (now Kaa) Manakpur. The city still has some architectural remains which tell the history and reflect its glorious past. Manakpur Town is the second oldest town of Uttar Pradesh. This place is on bank of the river Ganga in between Kanpur and Allahabad. Kan-Manakpur was a subah (province) in medieval India. It consisted of two strongholds: Kaa and Manikpur, now located on either side of the Ganga and is now in Uttar Pradesh. This two places have been bifurcated by the river which changed its course. Kaa now falls in Kaushambi district, while Manakpur has become a part of Pratapgarh district. It is called the

"town of kings and saints".

Manikpur and Kaa were important seats of government in the early Muslim period. Alauddin Khilji was the governor there before he ascended the throne of Delhi by murdering his uncle on the sands of the river between Manikpur and Kaa. The names of kings who inhabited by Manakpur are Alauddin Khilji, Jalaluddin Khilji, Balban, Raja Manikchand, Raja Tassuq Husain (Father in Law of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Awadh).

Allahabad-

Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji reached Prayag (later Allahabad and now Prayagraj) about February, 1666. He stayed there for two months but historian Dr. Gopal Singh says was for about six months. This city is also referred to as Triveni since three rivers i.e. Ganga, Jamuna and the legendary Saraswati (fabled subterranean river) become one here. It is a celebrated place of pilgrimage. They stayed at Ahilyapur Mohalla. Mata Gujari conceived for the first time in thirty-three years of her married life. Guru Gobind Singh wrote in Bachitter Natak:

"Mur pit purab kin payâñă

Bhânt bhant ketirath nână

Jab he jät Tribaini bhaye

Pun dân karat bataye"

[My father went to the east, He visited all sorts of places of pilgrimages; When he reached Tribeni (Prayag), He remained busy in alms- giving.)

It was at this sacred place and in the holy atmosphere where Guru Tegh Bahadur was busy giving away his spiritual and material wealth. Guru Ji blessed the people with all the bounties. People of Prayag were much impressed with the simple mission and the charming personality of the Great Guru.

Benares

he city has been blessed by the physical presence of the First, Ninth and Tenth Sikh Guru- Guru Nanak, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh. It is the place where saints like Kabir and Ravidas, whose hymns are included in the Guru Granth Sahib, resided. Benares is the oldest holy place of the Hindus east of Prayag and on the banks of river Ganges. The two main Sikh Gurdwaras located in the periphery of city Nichibagh (Bari Sangatland Gurubagh(Luxa Road) are of immense historical value. The first one commemorates the visit of Guru Tegh Bahadur and the second one of Guru Nanak Dev. During Guru Tegh Bahadur's visit it was the centre of Sikhism for the entire region of Poorbanchal, i.e. Jaunpur, Gorakhpur, Nizamabad, Mirzapur, Gazipur and such other places. Important Sikh missionaries like Bhai Gurdas stayed for more than two years in the beginning of the 17th century and propagated Sikhism before being recalled by the Sixth Master, Guru Har Gobind Ji. It is also connected with Sikhism related to Udasi and Nirmala activities. According to Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, Guru Granth Sahib was installed in at least 40 places belonging to Udasi and Nirmala saints, but now the numbers has come down to very few.

Sasaram

Legend has it that Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, while going to Patna from Benares stayed at Sasaram for 21 days. He was accompanied by his mother Nanaki Ji, wife Mata Gujari Ji, Baba Kirpal Ji (brother of Gujari ji) along with Sadh-Sangat.

One day Baba Phaagu Mal came to know about Guru Ji's impending arrival at Sasaram. He get constructed made a huge gate so that Guru Ji's entourage would not have any problem in entering the house. Guru Ji mounted on his horse entered Baba Phaagu Mal's Kutiya, and called out to him, "Chachaji, A have come". Tears of love and respect started rolling down from the old man's eyes. Thousands of devotees came and participated in Satsang of Guru Ji. Local zamindars donated valuables as 'daswand', as a tribute to Guru Ji and Sangat. According to the folklore, Guru Ji got one 'Beri' from the house of an old lady (devotee, who didn't had any other thing offer due to her poverty). Guru Ji blessed her and accepted gladly and sowed it in front of Chachaji's cottage. Till now, this 350 year-old historical Beri' exists as a huge tree. It is said that during the visit of Guru Ji to Sasaram, the number of Sikhs swelled.

It is also said that Guru Ji composed 'Baani' in Raag Jaijawanti at this spot. [Raag Jaijawanti Mahalla 9, "Raam SimarRaamSimar, EeHeTere Karaj Hai....."]

This part of Gurbani is in clear Bhojpuri dialect. Thus it not only concretizes the logic of a Sikh era of literature, through the emergence of this faith and the awakening of peripheral lives, but also records the multiplicity of texts that emerged with the travelling of the great Gurus across the country. Gaya

Gaya is a very important town for the Hindus and the Buddhists. Gaya bears witness to the legacy of more than two thousand years of history of our country's great religious traditions set by famous philosophers and scholars. Guru Nanak visited this place while coming from Benares on way to Patna after preaching to the people to achieve true liberation by lighting the lamp of knowledge of the divine Name.

Later on, the Ninth Master, Guru Tegh Bahadur, visited this place before the rainy season in 1666. There is a Gurdwara which was earlier controlled by the Udassis, known as Gurdwara Deo Ghat or Nanak-Shahi to commemorate the famous visit of both the Gurus to this place. The building of this shrine was built by a very prominent Udasi Pracharak, Baba Almast. He was the head preacher of one of the main Dhuan established by Baba Gurdita, the eldest son of the Sixth Master, Sri Guru Hargobind Ji, successor of Baba Sri Chand, the founder of the Udasi order. Some early and renowned Khatri settlers helped it to function and a trust was created for this purpose. Sikhs across the globe including our supreme bodies should look into this matter with the seriousness it deserves. For the Sikhs this place is very important historically, because after Takht Sri Harmandir Ji, Patna Sahib, about a hundred kilometers from Gaya, is the next most sacred seat of Sikhism. The Gaya Gurdwara is now in a very dilapidated condition with no maintenance, and even without any caretaker.

Rajgir

This old historical town is placed in

the laps of the colourful hills. This is a very important place from the religious point of view. Rajgir is associated with Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism from the very early times. It is famous for hot springs. Just opposite to famous hot spring, called Brahmkund, there is Gurdwara and the reservoir of cold water is called 'Sheetal- kund' or 'Nanak-kund'. This place is said to have been visited by Guru Nanak and Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji.

Patna

In the 17th and 18th century Patna was an important trading hub and riverport and boasted of very flourishing economy, the major share of the activities being with the Europeans, Armenians and other international traders. Patna was the home to the great Sikh Guru Tegh

Bahadur's family for few years. One of the most important and historical shrines of entire Sikh world is Takht Sri Harimandir Ji of Patna, the birth place of the tenth master Guru Govind Singh. Harimandir is situated in a lane called Harimandir Ki- Galli, opposite Jhauganj Post Office, within the jurisdiction of Chowk Kalan Police Station. Sikhs from the entire world come to pay respect to this shrine. It was the headquarters of PurabiSangat i.e. umbrella organization of Sikhs of the Eastern part of the country. A 'Hukumnama' (order copy) to 'PurabiSangat' by the sixth Master Guru Hargobind, which is preserved supports this fact. Documentary evidence proves that during the time of Guru Hargobind the Sikh Sangats had firmly been established at various places such as Alamganj, Monghyr, Patna, Rajmahal, Dacca and some other cities of eastern India.

Many Hukumnamas sent by the Gurus and one by Mata Sundari were in the name of East Indian Sangats. This shows the importance of the great shrine from early days.

Patna already had become the main diocese of Sikhs of east India, covering the area between Dacca and Puri. Guru Tegh Bahadur reached Patna in the month of May 1666. But before leaving for different places he made necessary arrangements under the supervision of a devout Sikh lady, known as Mata Paidi and prominent Sikhs like Raja Fateh Chand Maini, for the safe stay of his family at Patna during the rainy season. Then Mata Gujari Ji was expecting a child as has been mentioned before.

Patna, or Pataliputra was known since the ancient times. This was hallowed by the presence of many holy men including the Mahavira, Buddha, Guru Nanak and Guru Tegh Bahadur. The birth-place of Guru Gobind Singh, Ji known as Sri Harimandir, is a magnificent building. There are also many other Gurdwaras associated with the names of Guru Nanak, Guru Tegh, Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh.

Barh:- Barh town divided in two parts by National Highway 31. The older section seems to be on bank of the river Ganga. This place is about 70 kilometre east from Patna. Guru Tegh Bahadur stayed here while going towards Dacca. A Gurdwara is under the management of Takht Patna Sahib is in the old market place of Barh Bazar near Teraha More which was devastated in the 1934 earthquake. No repairing or reconstruction has been done. There is Guru Granth Sahib and Janam-Sakhi of Bhai Bala, It is located just opposite to Vaisnodham Mandir and on the left is Jain Mandir. Bhai Kanahiya Singh alias Kamdahia Singh was last Granthi, now-a-days his wife Bibi Kulwant Kaur has been taking care of this Gurdwara since his demise.

Munger- PakkiSangat

This Sangat on Belan Bazar on Pipal-Patti Road is very old and commemorates the travel of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji during his visit to Dacca and Assam. There is a bed said to be extant

from Guru Ji's time. There are two hand-written, one old printed and one newly printed Guru Granth Sahib. The correspondence made of Guru Tegh Bahadur with prominent Sikhs named 'Hukumnama' found in Munger describes the stay and underscores the importance of this place in Sikh annals. There are two 'samadhis' of very early Mahants, Baba Pardeshi Ram and Baba Videshi Ram. The descendants of the Mahants are the present care-takers. There is Nishan Sahib erected at the initiative of a devout Sikh, Jagat Singh.

Bhagalpur

This is another important place where both Guru Nanak Sahib and Guru Tegh Bahadur stayed in the course of their tour towards the east. Two places worth mentioning are as follows.

Gurdwara Bari Sangat

Bari Sangat, said to be oldest is in Naya Bazar, Mahant Narayan Das Lane (Mohan Press Galli) commemorates the travel of ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib. Mahant Narayan Das was one of the Mahants about a hundred years ago.

Gurdwara Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji Bari Sangat is on right side of 'Burha-Nath Ghat' of the river Ganga on 'Sakhi-Chand Ghat' Guru Tegh Bahadur is said to have stayed here while going further east. Chotti Sangat This is a very important site in Jogsar Mohalla near Burhanath Mandir on the banks of river Ganga. This is a very old Sangat said to be connected to the travels of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji. The descendants of the Mahants can remember quite a few Mahants. chronologically. There is an old hand-written Guru Granth Sahib kept with due respect and sanctity Kantnagar Guru Tegh Bahadur's Visit of Kant nagar- After one and a half century of Sri Guru Nanak's travels, Guru Tegh Bahadur again visited this part of India, obviously to rekindle the spirit of Sikhism. Where-ever the Ninth Guru went he advised his followers to organize themselves into congregational circles and follow the tenets of Sikhism with religious zeal. In 1666 Guru Tegh Bahadur arrived at the settlement of Kantnagar. Here he stayed for a few days and preached the message of Sikhism among the people. Devotees came in large numbers and joined the congregation. At that time a good number of people who embraced his faith were subsequently came to be known as Nanak Panthis. Kantnagar was a big and prosperous village. It is said that thirty-six watchmen (chowkidars) used to keep round-the-clock vigil in this village. Situated on the left bank of the Ganga it was an important river port at that time After continuous floods, about hundred and fifty years ago the place was went under waters. The Sikhs brought out Guru Granth Sahib and established a new Gurdwara in safer place called Laxmipur in memory of Guru Tegh Bahadur's visit.

As you enter through a huge gate built in memory of Guru Tegh Bahadur in Laxmipur, you are immediately struck by its serenity and calmness besides the imprints of Sikhism all around. One cannot fail to notice a vibrant village life which is steeped in a unique kind of history, culture and heritage. Compared to other parts of rural Bihar, it is an affluent settlement with an impressive presence of Sikhs.

Rajmahal

"Rajmahal Bhanu Behal Bhau Bhagat Gurmat Man Bhani, Sanmukh Sodhi Badli Seth Gopale Gurmat Jaani".

As per the above line of Vaars of Bhai Gurdas the prominent Sikhs during the time of Guru Hargobind, Bhanu Behal, Badli Sodhi and Seth Gopal of Rajmahal were well acquainted with the thoughts of the Gurus and were great devotees of the Guru. This shows the importance of Sikhs of Rajmahal. Historically, it was a very important place in the medieval period, and was well connected with Patna and Dacca.

The town is on the banks of the river Ganga, bordering Bengal and Bihar (now Jharkhand). In 1576, the Battle of Rajmahal was fought between Mughal Emperor, Akbar and Sultan of Bengal, Daud Khan of Karani Dynasty. Daud Khan was captured and later executed by the Mughals. Later, after the conquest of Odisha in 1592, Raja Man Singh I, Mughal governor of Bengal Subah, came to Rajmahal. He chose the site for his capital in 1595-96 because of its strategic command of the Teliagarhi Pass and the river,

In 1608, the capital of Bengal was transferred to Dacca (now Dhaka, Bangladesh). Raja Man Singh also renamed Rajmahal as 'Akbarnagar' as a tribute to Emperor Akbar and also constructed palaces, gardens and mosques on behalf of Mughal rulers. In 1639, Rajmahal regained its glory and was once more made the capital of Bengal by Shah Shuja, governor of Bengal Subah and second son of Emperor Shah Jahan. It continued as the seat of the Mughal Viceroy up to 1660 and a mint town till 1661.

Malda and Makhsudabad

Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji visited both the places while moving farther east to Dacca. Both were very famous towns thriving on silk and cotton industry. Traders from all over the world thronged these places. A Gurdwara situated in the Sarbari area of old part of Malda town, situated on the confluence of the Mahananda and Kalindi rivers. Malda was the capital of Bengal and known as Goud, in the early medieval times. It is diagonally opposite to Rajmahal.

Makhsudabad is on the banks of the river Bhagirathi. Owing to its strategic location it became the capital of Subah Bengal being shifted, from Dacca during the term of Murshid Quli Khan in the early 18th century and name of the town was changed to Murshidabad. There was a Gurdwaran run by Udasi saints, but now it doesn't exist

Dacca

"ChaaleSanmukh Desh Bangale, Dundabhi Baaje Shabd Vishale".

In "Suraj Prakash Bhai Santokh Singh writes "When Guru Ji starts from Patna to Dacca, passing big towns on the river Ganga like Munger, Bhagalpur loud sound of 'nagara' (drums) was made in the respect of Guruji".

In 1666AD Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji visited Dacca, among the most prosperous of SouthAsian provinces. Bengal was a magnet for traders from Britain in 17th century under the Mughal Governor Shaista Khan. Guru Ji was accorded a warm and rousing welcome by the local Sangat as well as the influential Nawab Saishta Khan, brother of Empress Mumtaz Mahal, wife of Shah Jahan. The areas like Sangat-tolla where Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji is said to have stayed during his prolonged visit were exclusive Sikh Mohallas During this visit of Guru TeghBahadur the Sangat of Dacca was called Hazuri Sangat. Bhai Natha and Bulaki Das made arrangements for the stay of the Ninth Master, during this visit between 1666 and 1670 approximately with some breaks for visiting other places. As per the census report of 1830 the number of Sikhs they all were Khatris) was around 100 out of 32,000 Hindus. In the mid-19th century eminent Sikh chronicler, Giani Gian Singh, stayed in Dacca for about seventeen months researching on Sikhism of Dacca and East India. In his account, "Twarikh Guru Khalsa", he gives a foot note on Dacca. He states that local Sikhs were very much pleased with him owing to his missionary and dedicated zeal for the cause of Sikhism. They offered him their daughters and settle there for the benefit of local Sikhs. Giani ji of course declined, as he had taken upon himself the mission of his life to spread Sikhism. There was a big house at No 14 Shreesh Das Lane at SangatTolla of Bangla Bazar. This was known as 'Sikher Bari' which means the House of Sikhs. Guru Tegh Bahadur made it his residence-cum-preaching centre during his long stay at Dacca. In those days a Portuguese company also existed at Sangat Tolla area. It was mostly inhabited by Sikh Sangat staying in many houses of this locality even before Independence.

The Sikhs of Dacca were well connected with the Sikhs of East India, especially Patna Sahib. Patna Sahib's private retinue of army was sent to Dacca many times on various missions. One Sikh, named Bhai Mohan Singh, was appointed Diwan of Chittagong in the second quarter of 18th century during the reign of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan. Noted Historian, Dr Tirlochan Singh, observed, "Diwan Mohan Singh was no less a pious Sikh than a brave soldier and an able administrator. He made good opportunity and established more than a dozen of Sangats within his jurisdiction and attached Jagirs to one and all of them".

Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers by B.C.Allen, published in the early 20th century, give some description of the Guru's visit to Dacca and about the Sikhs, "Guru Tegh Bahadur visited Dacca, and there is a Sikh temple at Shujatpur near the Ramna. The Sangat at

Sangattolla close to Sutrapur is now the chief place of worship but pious Sikhs still visit the ruins at Jafarabad where there is a well whose waters are thought to have curative powers".

Importance of Dacca for the Sikhs dates back to the visit of Guru Nanak in his first Udasi to spread the message of truth, righteousness and other human values to live on this earth peacefully. The Sangat of Dacca was illuminated by his effulgent message. Many places are said to be linked with the Guru's tour and wells were sunk to provide fresh drinking water to his followers and common people alike. It is said that the colour of water changed thrice in a day and local Bengalis treated it with pious belief that Thakur Nanak (they address Guru Nanak in their local term) was there in this well. This was called as Barchha Sahib as per Bhai Dhanna Singh Chahal who visited Dacca in the 1930s. There were some lores relating to Guru Nanak's visit and his drawing drinking water by piercing a spear in the ground. This is now extinct. One Gurdwara, said to have been visited by Guru Nanak, is at Ramna and is called Nanak Shahi Gurdwara. It is near the race course. It was earlier known as 'Nanak Ka Chapra' i.e. shelter of Nanak. Guru Nanak rested here. Some part of the land of this Gurdwara was later acquired for the construction of Dacca University. Baba Gurditta (eldest son of the Sixth Master Guru Hargobind), head of Udasi sect sent the noted missionary, Baba Almast (head of one of the Dhuanas) to Eastern India including Dacca, to trace the places of Guru Nanak's visit and propagate the tenets of Guru Granth Sahib. After him Bhai Natha was in charge of Bengal's Sangat. He initiated the construction of Nanak Shahi Sangat.

While Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, was at Dacca, the Sangat of nearby areas frequently requested Guruji to visit their places. So he started his tour to Jayantia hills, Shylet and then to Shaistaganj, Comilla, Lakhsham, Daulatganj Sitakund, Hath Hazari and onward to Chittagong and the sea-port of Sondip. He came back to Dacca after meeting the Sangat of Bengal from Noakhali, Chandpur and Narainganj. The purpose of his visit was to renew the ties with the Sangats already established by Guru Nanak and further strengthened by Guru Amardas Ji and respected Udasi missionaries. The effect of the Guru's tour was miraculous and a big number of Sangats came up in Bengal. These Sikhs were always ready to perform any type of Sewa: from monetary assistance to manual labour and whenever there was a call from Guru Gobind Singh later on in the hours of struggle against the oppression of the Mughal rulers. There is a Gurdwara Sangat Suthra Shahi at Urdu Bazaar and another one on English Road in Dacca. Nawab Shaista Khan awarded jagirs to Gurdwara Sangat Tolla and Gurdwara Nanak Shahi in Dacca after the visit of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji. Dr Tirlochan Singh who quoted from, "Topography and Statistics of Dacca 1840AD", by James Taylor, confirms the presence of twelve Sangata beside the institution and places of other religion. Dr Tirlochan Singh visited Dacca in 1959 and tried to bring to the notice of the administration the mistuse of Sikh shrines by some unscrupulous people. It is there in his invaluable work on the life of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji.

Different places of Assam

Guru Tegh Bahadur reached Kamrup and preached among the people for some time. Here, he also brought a compromise between the forces of Raja Ram Singh, a Kshatriya general of Aurangzeb (who had led expedition against Assam), and the local Ahom ruler as a true saint should have done. Towards the close of 1668, they set out for Assam, crossed the Brahmaputra and reached Dhubri, which had also been visited by Guru Nanak during his travels in eastern India. Guru Tegh Bahadur marked out the spot where the First Guru had sat. People thronged to see him. Guru Tegh Bahadur travelled to many places like Rangamati, Kamakhya to as far as Hajo. After some time, Guru Ji went back to Dacca in April or May, 1670. Return Journey from Dacca

In Dacca Guru Tegh Bahadur got royal reception. Guru Ji informed the Sangat of his going back. Guru Ji appointed Bhai Natha as chief missionary of Bengal and Bulaki Das as Masand of Dacca region. The homeward journey began in 1670 amidst a very elaborate farewell in a fitting manner. Sangat from many parts came to bid farewell with moist eyes. This journey was faster than the outward journey. The change in Aurangzeb's religious policy to the detriment of non-Muslims, caused considerable concern to Guru Tegh Bahadur. He now wanted to be by the side of his people. The longest halt was at Patna where the Guru rejoined his family and saw for the first time his son, Gobind Rai. The span of the stay in Patna on return journey varies in opinion of different researchers. Then Guru Ji moved towards Punjab visiting different places already discussed in the beginning

A note on Jaunpur:-

Jaunpur is situated on the banks of the river Gomti. The Gomti, also known as Vashisti, originates from the lake of Pilibhit of Shahjahanpur and touches Kheri, Lucknow, and Jaunpur flowing about eight hundred kilometres before meeting the river Ganga in Saidpur. Guru Nanak visited Jaunpur during his first Udasi from Varanasi and then moved to further east. Few old Sikh families stay at Jaunpur with an old Gurdwara named Mirdang Walisangat in memory of Ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji. This place was said to be the residence of Bhai Gurbakhs Ji. The Guru Granth Sahib is seated here in a commodious rectangular hall. A platform built inside a separate small room represents the Tap Asthan. Near this and the beside river, there is narrow well and a ruined hut. About two acres of land is shown in the name of Gurdwara Bari Sangat under revenue village of Chachakpur. This Sangat is said to be established by one of the prominent early Sikh missionaries, Bhai Gurdas Ji under the patronage of sixth master Guru Hargobind. This place is on the eastern side of the Gomti river.

Guru Tegh Bahadur, along with large group of Sangat, visited Varanasi while coming from Allahabad and Mirzapur and stayed there for some time. News of Guru Ji's visit spread to all nearby areas. This was followed by large number of Sangat visiting him and paying tributes. The Sangat of Jaunpur visited under the supervision of Bhai Gurbaksh Masand with large offerings. They listened to Guru's kirtan with utmost devotion. Guru Ji was so pleased that he blessed them and gifted Bhai Gurbaksh a 'Mirdang' (ancient Indian percussion instrument). From that time the Gurdwara became famous as "MirdangWaliSangat". Again, Guru Ji, while returning to Anandpur Sahib from his entourage of the east from Patna via Arrah, Chapra and Buxar, made a stay at Jaunpur's MirdangWaliSangat for five days. He blessed the masses of this area under leadership of Bhai Gurbaksh Ji.

After touching few more places Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji moved to Punjab, thus concluding the great holy travels of east India. Later on his supreme sacrifice infused new spirit of bravery and valour and became the most distinctive feature of his successor, tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh.

CONCLUSION

Wherever Guru Tegh Bahadur went, a huge mass fell into his following. These people in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Assam, Odisha and Bangladesh constitute a very vital historical and spiritual component of the mainstream Sikhism. They might have been in these faraway places for over three centuries in complete isolation from the fountainhead, i.e., the Akal Takht, but they have retained their distinct culture in a different social milieu while adapting and adjusting to the local ones in a most syncretic manner. We are gearing ourselves to celebrate in 2021 the 400 Parkash-Purab of Guru Tegh Bahadur. We have already celebrated 350 Parkash-Purab of Guru Gobind Singh, and then 550 Parkash-Purab of Guru Nanak Dev. But never celebrated the great holy tours of our great Gurus, firstly the 500th anniversary of Guru Nanak's first Udasi and secondly 350th year of holy travels of Guru Tegh Bahadur towards East India. Both these occasions were also important for the Sikhs of this region in terms of our glorious legacy. We should embrace these distant people with the warmth of love of a brother and commit ourselves to their well-being in all manners possible. There should be a tie-up between Patna Sahib, the undoubted second most important citadel of our religion, and various Gurdwaras of historical importance in the States mentioned above and Bangladesh since they constitute important signposts in the journey of Guru Nanak Sahib some five hundred years ago, and later hallowed by the presence of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji and Guru Gobind Singh Ji. A would make particular mention of Benaras, Nizamabad, Allahabad in eastern Uttar Pradesh; Rajgir, Sasaram, Gaya, Kedli Chatti, Laxmipur, Maheshwa (Katihar) and Halhalia (Araria) in Bihar, Dhubri and Naogaon in Assam; Dhaka, Chittagong, Rongpur, Dinajpur and Mymensingh in Bangladesh, Malda,

Kolkata, Bishnupur and Chandrakona in West Bengal and Bhadrak, Cuttack and Puri in Odisha.

At many places new Gurdwara buildings are to be established for congregations. The older ones in dilapidated conditions are to be restored and maintained. The motive should be to make the Sikh brotherhood aware of their historic relationship. The historic bonding should be preserved. There is large scope for development of Sikhism in Bihar and other places of Eastern India as well. mic.