



The father of Divine Red Cross

# Bhai Kanhaiya-Epitome of Selfless Sewa

*By Bishan Singh Bedi*

Na ko bairee nahee bigana sagal sang hum kau ban aayee (1299)  
(No one is my foe, nor is any one alien, I get along well with everybody.)

**D**uring the rule of Aurangzeb, the then Mughal emperor; his government and his army inflicted awful cruelty and tyranny on downtrodden and innocent people of the country. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Master of the Sikhs, fought the mighty Mughal army valiantly to save the masses from these miseries.



Bhai Kanhaiya ends his quest for peace and Truth after seeking refuge of Guru Teg Bahadur

This divine movement of the tenth Guru was not relished by empire and the Mughal army fought many battles with the Sikh soldiers of Guru Gobind Singh. In the battlefield, the tenth Guru deputed his most devoted Sikh, named Kanhaiya, to serve water to the injured soldiers from both sides, irrespective of their religion, caste or creed. Accordingly, he used to serve water not only to the Sikh soldiers, but also to the injured Mughal soldiers. After getting water, they used to gain strength to fight against the Sikh soldiers, which was not relished by the later.

Sikh soldiers complained to the Guru that Bhai Kanhaiya was a traitor, as he was serving water to the injured soldiers of the enemy. Guru Gobind Singh, with a divine smile, summoned



Bhai Kanhaiya, conferring with saadhhus, sages and ascetics in search of spiritual peace

Bhai Kanhaiya to seek his explanation. The Sikh soldiers dragged Bhai Kanhaiya to the court of Guru Gobind Singh and raised many objections and made allegations against him for this act of treason. Guru Gobind Singh asked Bhai Kanhaiya as to why he was serving water to the injured soldiers of the enemy. With tears in his eyes, Bhai Kanhaiya humbly submitted with folded hands, "O Divine Master, I have not served water to the enemy." On this, the Sikh soldiers reiterated that Kanhaiya was telling a lie. He served water to the injured soldiers of the enemy

**"I think Guru Sahib's Langar system and allowing Bhai Kanhaiya to serve Muslim injured soldiers during the war gives us clear message that Sikh Gurus were not establishing another Dharma to bring division in human beings but they were all for unity." - Sajjan Singh**

in our presence. The Guru again asked Bhai Kanhaiya with a divine smile, "To whom were you serving water?" Bhai Kanhaiya again humbly submitted, "I serve water to you and not to any foe, because I perceive your divine light in every

one, irrespective of friend or foe. I learned this divine lesson from you, my master, which is imbued in my heart to see all-in-one and one-in-all. That is why I serve all, irrespective of their belief and faith, being the children of one Divine Father":

### **Sabhe saanjheewaal sadaa-i-n tu kisai na disah baahraa jeeo (97)**

(All humans form a common fellowship. O Lord! You are alien to no one.)"

On hearing this, Guru Gobind Singh embraced Bhai Kanhaiya with love and affection and told everybody, "He is my real follower, i.e., a true Sikh, treading the Divine Path to become a *Gurmukh*." The Guru blessed him with a first-aid box containing ointment and told him not only to give water to the injured but also treat their injuries in the battlefield without any discrimination.

Thus the great Guru spoke to the narrow-minded Sikh soldiers to fight in the battlefield broadmindedly, upholding the divine cause only and not to fight with ill will, anger, hatred and evil because such fight would not lead them to the path of divine.

Turning to the *Sangat*, Guru Ji said, "*Saadh Sangat*, Bhai Kanhaiya is a God-fearing saintly soul. His impartial and non-biased behavior towards others has led him to achieve *Sehaj-avastha*. Let him carry on with his mission. Many more will follow in his footsteps in the years to come and keep the tradition of *Nishkam Sewa* alive."

He reminded the *Sangat* of Guru Arjan's *Shabad*:

**Bisr gayee sab taat prayee, Jab te Saadh Sangat mohe payee  
Naa ko bairee nahee bigana sagal sang hum kau ban aayee  
Jo prabh keeno so bhal maanio eh sumat saadhu te paa-ee.**

### **Sab mah rav rahiaa prabh ekai pekh pekh Nanak bigsaa-ee (1299)**

*(I have completely forgotten the jealousy of others since I found the company of holy persons. No one is my foe and no one is alien, I get along with every one. Whatever God does, I accept that as good. This is the sublime wisdom, I have obtained from the holy. The Supreme Being is pervading in all. Gazing upon Him and beholding Him, Nanak blossoms forth in happiness.)*

This inspired a group of volunteers, who worked under the guidance of Bhai Kanhaiya.

This is a unique example in the world, where friends and foes are treated alike. In fact, Bhai Kanhaiya laid the foundation of the so-called Divine Red Cross, which is beyond the imagination of the present day Red Cross founded by Sir Henry Durant

about 160 years later, because the present day Red Cross is a separate neutral organization accepted by all, which treats the injured in the battlefield of both the armies of the fighting countries.

Bhai Kanhaiya (1648-1718), the disciple of Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib was an epitome of humility, devotion and loyalty to his Guru, who had taught him to render service to mankind without any discrimination of religion, caste or region. He was directed to establish the *Sewapanthi* or *Addansbahi* order of the Sikhs by Guru Gobind Singh. Bhai Kanhaiya was born in a Dhamman *Kbatri* family of village Sodhra near Wazirabad on the banks of river Chenab in Sialkot district (now in Pakistan). Bhai Kanhaiya was devoted to the cause of the needy and downtrodden. His father was a wealthy trader, but he himself, being of a religious bent, had little interest in the family business and would spend most of the time in the company of the holy. When his father expired, he waited for his brothers to take over the responsibility and set out to find a Guru, who could guide him on the path of *Sewa*. He came to Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib and got the opportunity to serve him for three months. After this initiation at the hands of the Guru, he went on to establish a *Dharmasal* at Kavha village near Attock district (now in

**The present day Red Cross, which Sir Henry Durant founded about 160 years later, works as a neutral third party, whenever there is a conflict between the two nations, whereas the philosophy of Guru Nanak as propounded through the services of Bhai Kanhaiya, is unique in that, it serves the enemy also in the battlefield.**



Bhai Kanhaiya at Kavha Dharamsal, providing water and resting place for the wayfarers

Pakistan) to serve the people, and to spread the message of 'Universal Brotherhood' as taught by Guru Nanak. It turned out to be a preaching center.

When Guru Gobind Singh left Anandpur Sahib, Bhai Kanhaiya continued to serve the people and devoted his remaining life to preach and practice the teachings of the Sikh Gurus till he merged with the Divine Light at the age of 70 after retiring to Sodhra, where he was born, leaving behind a unique legacy of *Sewa Panthi*, which literally means people devoted to the service of humanity.

Today Bhai Kanhaiya is not with us, but as you walk in the compound of his memorial - *Gurdwara Aduti Sewa* - you can almost sense his presence amidst the surroundings. Automatically, an image of this tall and lanky figure carrying a water-filled *mashak* (water-filled leather bag) on his back begins to flash the 'inward eye', especially when you walk towards his old hut, which has been preserved in its original pristine form.

The philosophy of Bhai Kanhaiya's universal message of compassion and kindness, as enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib: '*Na ko bairi nabee bigana, sagal sang hum kau ban aayee*' continues to be as relevant today as it was three centuries ago



Bhai Kanhiya receiving a box of ointment from Guru Gobind Singh

and will continue to be relevant for all times to come. It is more relevant today than ever before for the entire world, when 'clash of civilizations' thesis has become a fashion.

An award has been instituted in memory of Bhai Kanhaiya to honor the individuals/organizations, who serve mankind in the same spirit of devotion and selflessness.

The Government of India has released a commemorative stamp to honor the selfless Sikh, who spread the message of Universal Brotherhood by serving water to one and sundry in the battlefield. The First Day Cover depicts Bhai Kanhaiya receiving the box of ointment from the tenth Master.



The stamp depicting Bhai Kanhaiya spreading the message of universal brotherhood, as the water server

