

Baba Nanak in Iraq

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A FEW years ago while on a tour of several countries, I found myself in Baghdad, right on the outskirts. Out there, in a graveyard one mile to the right of the River Tigris stands the tomb of Sheikh Bahlol Dana the Wise. Bahlol Dana was the fakir who played host to Guru Nanak during his visit to Baghdad (Guru Nanak stayed for around four months in Baghdad).

The story goes that Guru Nanak's companion Baba Mardana, who accompanied Guru Nanak on most of his journeys, especially the long ones, used to play the rabab and Baba Nanak used to sing various verses in praise of the Creator. In Baghdad one fine morning, while they were doing just this, Guru Nanak gave voice to the expression that there were numerous Patals (nether worlds) and innumerable Akash (skies). When it was told to the gathering what Baba Nanak was saying, some of the people there took exception to this utterance and reported the matter to the Sajjada Nashin (the chief custodian) of

the shrine of the great pir Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani. It was ordered that the offender should be stoned to death and numerous people armed themselves with stones and rushed out. In the meantime Baba Nanak concluded his morning prayers with the greeting 'Sat Kartar'. The armed mob found to their amazement that this had such a divinely electrifying effect on them that they could not attack him.

Sheikh Bahlol Dana the Wise then came forward and had a discourse with Guru Nanak on different aspects of religion and life. Guru Nanak explained to him that we cannot define all the creations of the Almighty, which are infinite and it is beyond human capabilities to know the whole truth.

During his stay in Baghdad, Guru Nanak had discourses with many other holy men too. Before his departure from Baghdad he was presented a chola (robe) as a token of respect, on which verses in Arabic were inscribed. This chola still lies preserved in the Gurudwara at Dera Baba Nanak in Pakistan.

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