

Baisakhi

Baisakhi Mela is a major festival in Punjab. It is one of the most colourful aspects of Baisakhi celebrations in the state of Punjab. It is known as harvesting festival. It is celebrated after rabi crop is ready, in such type of fairs various colours of culture can be seen. One can find vivid and vibrant colours of life in rural Punjab in such fairs. Happy with the harvest and the ensuing prosperity, men and women dress themselves in their fanciest clothes and participate in the Baisakhi fair with joy and enthusiasm.

Baisakhi Fairs are extremely popular amongst the people of Punjab. People come with their family and friends to participate in fairs from far off places.

In these fairs many colours of Punjab culture can be seen like there are bhangra and gidda performances. Other activities that delight people are races, wrestling bouts, singing and acrobatics. Performance of folk instruments, such as vanjli and algoza is also quite popular.

There are many stalls selling bangles, toys, local handicrafts and other trinkets of domestic use. Food stalls are also a major crowd-puller in a Baisakhi Mela. Baisakhi Fairs is marked of Talwandi Sabo. Here, Guru Gobind Singh stayed for nine months and completed the recompilation of the Guru Granth Sahib.

History of Baisakhi

Baisakhi is celebrated as the Sikh New Year and the founding of the Khalsa Panth.

It is said that the story of Baisakhi Festival began with the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur, the ninth Sikh Guru who was publicly beheaded by the Aurungzeb, the Mughal ruler. Aurungzeb wanted to spread Islam in India and Guru Tegh Bahadur stood up for the rights of Hindus and Sikhs and the Mughals therefore saw him as a threat.

After the death of Guru Teg Bahadur, his son, Guru Gobind Singh became the next Guru of the Sikhs. Guru Gobind Singh wished to instill courage and strength to sacrifice among his fellow men. To fulfil his dream, Guru Gobind Singh called on the historic Baisakhi Day congregation of Sikhs at Keshgarh Sahib near Anandpur on March 30, 1699.

When thousands of people assembled for Guru's blessing, Guru Gobind Singh came out of the tent carrying an bare sword. He gave a powerful speech to inculcate courage amongst fellowmen. At the end of the speech he said that every great deed was preceded by equally great sacrifice and demanded that anyone prepared to give his life come forward. On the Guru's third call, a young man offered himself. The Guru took the man inside a tent and reappeared alone with a bloodied sword. Guru Gobind Singh asked for another volunteer. This was repeated another four times until a total of five Sikhs had gone into the tent with the Guru. Everyone present was worried and thought that Guru Gobind Singh has killed five Sikhs. At this point Guru presented all the five men before the people. Every one present was surprised to see all five men alive and wearing turbans and saffron-coloured garments.

These five men were called Panj Piara or 'Beloved Five' by the Guru. The Guru blessed them with a Pahul ceremony. In an iron vessel, the Guru stirred with a sword called Khanda Sahib, the batasha that his wife, Mata Sundari Ji had put into water. The congregation recited verses from scriptures as the Guru performed the sacred ceremony. The water was now considered the sacred nectar of immortality called amrit. It was first given to the five volunteers, then drunk by the guru and later distributed amongst the crowd. With this ceremony, all those present, irrespective of caste or creed, became members of the Khalsa Pantha (the Order of the Pure Ones).

The Guru regarded the Panch Piaras as the first members of the Khalsa and the embodiment of the Guru himself. With the constitution of the Panj Pyare the high and low castes were amalgamated into one as among the original Panj Pyare, there was one Khatri, shopkeeper, one Jat, farmer, one Chhimba, calico printer, one Ghumar, water-carrier, and one Nai, a barber. The Guru gave the surname of Singh (Lion) to every Sikh and also took the name for himself. From Guru Gobind Rai he became Guru Gobind Singh. This was seen as a great step in national integration because society at that time was divided on the basis of religion, caste and social status.

Guru Gobind Singh also bestowed on Khalsa, the unique Sikh identity. He directed Sikhs to wear five K's: Kesh or long hair, Kangha or comb, Kripan or dagger, Kachha or shorts and a Kara or bracelet. Guru Gobind Singh also discontinued the tradition of Gurus and asked all Sikhs to accept the Grantha Sahib as their eternal guide. He urged them to come to him with their hair and beard unshorn to get baptized by the sword.

Legends of Baisakhi

There are various legends associated with the colourful and vibrant festival of Baisakhi. A study of these interesting legends of Baisakhi reveal that the day of Baisakhi is significant not just for Sikhs but also for Hindus and Buddhists alike. Besides, it is joyous to note that as a harvest festival, people of all communities in Punjab celebrate Baisakhi in a harmonious manner.

Harvest Festival

It is known as harvest festival because it marks the time for the harvest of Rabi crops and is therefore celebrated with extreme joy and enthusiasm in the state of Punjab where agriculture is the predominant occupation of the people. To celebrate the occasion, people dress themselves gaily and perform the joyful bhangra and gidda dance on the tune of the dhol. Farmers in Punjab celebrate Baisakhi Festival to hilt by feasting and merrymaking before they hit on tiring but joyful task of harvesting from the next day.

Birth of Khalsa

The day of Baisakhi marks the birth of Khalsa Panth and therefore holds tremendous significance for the Sikhs. It was on the Baisakhi Day meeting organized at Anandpur Sahib, in 1699, that the tenth Guru of Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh laid the foundation of Khalsa Panth and called on the Sikhs to sacrifice themselves for their community.

Day to Receive Guru's Blessings for Sikhs

According to a popular legend in Sikhism, it was on the day of Baisakhi in 1567 that Guru Amar Das had first institutionalized Baisakhi as one of the special days when all Sikhs would gather to receive the guru's blessings at Goindwal.

Foundation of Arya Samaj

The day of Baisakhi Festival is also important for the Hindus as it on this day in 1875 that Swami Dayanand Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj - a reformed sect of Hindus who are devoted to the Vedas for spiritual guidance and have discarded idol worship.

Attainment of Nirvana by Gautam Buddha

For the Buddhist, the day of Baisakhi Festival is significant, as according to a popular legend it was on this auspicious day that Gautam Buddha attained enlightenment or Nirvana under the Mahabodhi tree in the town of Gaya. For this reason, the day of Baisakhi is celebrated as Buddha Purnima in several parts of the country.

Rituals performed

People following Sikh faith wake up early in the morning and pay visit to gurdwaras to attend special prayer meetings. While most Sikhs strive to visit the revered Golden Temple or Anandpur Sahib, where the Khalsa was pronounced, those who are unable to do so visit their neighbourhood gurdwara.

At a gurdwara, the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of Sikhs is ceremonially taken out and is given a symbolical bath with milk and water. After these simple rituals, Guru Granth Sahib is placed on its throne with care. The book is then read out to the followers gathered in the gurdwara.

At noon, after the Baisakhi ardas, the Karah Prasad is offered to the guru for his blessings. It is then distributed to the congregation. The ceremony culminates with a special guru-ka-langar or the community lunch. People sit in rows with their heads covered as volunteers serve them with vegetarian meal.

Celebrations in the Fields

Since Baisakhi is also celebrated as a harvest festival, farmers in Punjab celebrate Baisakhi with energetic performance of bhangra and gidda dance. Men and women clad themselves in their traditional Bhangra dress and dance to the beat of dhol in a joyful festive atmosphere.

As a harvest festival, Baisakhi is also celebrated by different names and with different rituals in several regions of India. It is celebrated as Rongali Bihu in Assam, Naba Barsha in Bengal, Puthandu in Tamil Nadu, Vishu in Kerala and Vaishakha in Bihar.