

Bhai Ghanaiya Ji: The Dunant of India

Founder of Red Cross, Jean Henry Dunant, served the wounded soldiers of all three countries after the battle of Solferino in 1859. His ideas led to the creation of the world's largest voluntary organization in 1863. It also sowed the seeds of the International Humanitarian Law that govern all kinds of wars and arm conflicts.

The noble mission of the Red Cross have had been upheld at different times in the history of human civilization. In India as well there have been such instances during which individuals exhibited the spirit of Red Cross. One such widely acclaimed story is related to Bhai Ghanaiya of Punjab.



Bhai Ghanaiya Ji, a disciple of Guru Gobind Singh, one of the most exalted Sikh Gurus, initiated the concept of medical aid, offering drinking water and provide protection to the people without discrimination about 200 years before Red Cross was born.

Bhai Ghanaiya Ji or Bhai Kanhaiya Ji, was the founder of Sevapanthi or Addanshahi sect of the Sikhs. He was born in a Dhamman Khatri family of Sodhara near Wazirabad in Sialkot District (now in Pakistan). Like Dunant, his father was also a wealthy trader. Bhai, was of religious bent of mind from

early childhood. He left home and roamed about with sadhus (saints) and ascetics in search of spiritualism. His quest ended when he met Guru Tegh Bahadur, 10th Guru of Sikhs (1621-75) and accepted initiation by him. The mission of his life was to provide service to the suffering humanity without any distinction of nationality, caste or creed. He exhibited it in his daily life.

During the war of Anandpur Sahib (Punjab, India) Guru Gobind Singh, assigned him the task of serving water to the wounded Sikh soldiers. However, he performed his duty diligently without making any distinction between Sikhs and non Sikhs.

Some soldiers complained to Guru Gobind Singh that Bhai Ghanaiya Ji has been providing water and care to the fallen enemy soldiers as well. Guru Gobind Singh summoned Bhai Ghanaiya and questioned him on the complaint. He politely replied "Graceful lord you taught me the lesson of humanity, universal brotherhood, impartiality, equality, love, peace and serving the suffering humanity without discrimination on the grounds of caste, creed, race or colour. As such I see you only wherever I see people suffering. Hence I served water to the enemy soldiers as well."

The Guru, pleased with the reply, blessed him and told that Ghanaiya had understood his teaching correctly. Then Guru also gave him medicine to be put on the wounds of fallen soldiers.

This story is a befitting example of selfless service and a real precursor to the Red Cross.

