

BHAI MANI SINGH CONTRIBUTION IN SIKH HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

Bhai Mani Singh is an important personality in Sikh History. He was a very good speaker and writer. He performed the service of a priest in Amritsar and played an important role in reforming the dismal conditions there. He spent all his life for saving the unity, integrity and honour of Sikh religion and promoted knowledge among the Sikhs by becoming the founder of the Giani Sect. He created an example for the coming generations by sacrificing himself at the age of ninety years. The sacrifice of Bhai Mani Singh filled every Sikh with a wave of anger and impassion. His unique martyrdom had turned the history of Sikhism forwards. His personality, in real meaning; is a source of inspiration for his followers.

Sikh history, from the very beginning, has an important place in human welfare and social reforms for its sacrifices and martyrdoms. The ancestors and leaders of Sikh sect made important contributions at different times and places. Bhai Mani Singh showed his ability in different tasks initiated by Sikh Gurus by remaining in Sikh sect and took the cause of social reforms to a new height. To keep the dignity of Sikh History intact, he sacrificed his life by getting himself chopped into pieces at the age of 90 for not being able to pay the prescribed taxes.¹

While making an unparalleled contribution in the Sikh history, Bhai Mani Singh performed the service of a priest in Amritsar and played an important role in reforming the dismal conditions there. The apostates had taken the control of Amritsar for a long time. On the inhabitation of city of Kiratpur by sixth Sikh Guru Hargobind Singh, Amritsar was occupied by Sodhi Chand, the son of Prithi Chand by becoming the leader of apostates. After him, his son Sodhi Hari occupied it by putting up his throne there. During the time of Sodhi Hari, Guru Teg Bahadur was not allowed to enter the court of Amritsar.² After the death of Sodhi Hari in the year 1696, his son occupied the throne; after which the condition of *Akali Bunga* and Amritsar became shaky for which, the aggrieved people requested Guru Gobind

¹ Sagoo Harbans Kaur, *Sikh Shahadat Da Sankalp*, Jantak Press, Delhi, 2013, P-168.

² Jaggi Rattan Singh, *Bhai Mani Singh: Jivan Atte Rachna*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1983, P-7.

Singh at Anandpur to get them relieved of apostates and establish the rule of dignity by sending the faithfuls. While acceding to the request of people during the congregation of Baisakhi, he sent Bhai Mani Singh by giving him the title of High priest and sent five Sikhs along with him.³ Those six Sikhs left from Anandpur by taking the copy of *Guru Granth Sahib* and a flag of *Khalsa*. They took over the administration of Amritsar after reaching there and reviewed the prevailing conditions; on the occasion of martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev, scriptures were read from *Guru Granth Sahib* inside Golden Temple and the flag of *Khalsa* was installed.⁴ Bhai Mani Singh started Sikh code of conduct after ending the Code of *Meenia* in Guru's shrine. As per Sikh Code of Conduct, Bhai Mani Singh was the third priest of *Hari Mandir Sahib* at Amritsar. Firstly, this service was assigned to Baba Bhdha. Devotees were very pleased with Bhai Mani Singh taking over the charge of *Harimandir* at Amritsar. The might of *Meenia* continued sliding and congregations of Sikhs started organising there.⁵

Bhai Mani Singh had spent much of his time in Amritsar. During that time, he used to travel many times from Amritsar to Anandpur to see Guru Gobind Singh. Pleased at the services of Bhai Mani Singh, Guru Gobind Singh had also given him a commandment by which Guru Gobind said to Bhai Mani Singh that he was Guru's son, he should take charge of service of Guru's shrine; whatever donations would be collected should be utilised in the service of Guru's shrine, whosoever would misuse that money, he would not be his son. Service with a clean heart would be accepted and God himself would help him; there would be progress in everything.⁶ Bhai Mani Singh returned back after receiving the commandment and permission of Guru Gobind Singh. Here, after engaging in battle at Anandpur, Guru Gobind went to Malwa region. Bhai Mani Singh received the information in Amritsar that the mother of Guru Gobind Singh, his four sons and many other Sikhs were sacrificed in the battle with the enemy and five sons of Bhai Mani Singh were also among the dead. When Guru Gobind Singh reached *Sabo ki Talwandi*, Bhai Mani Singh also reached there with his Sikh colleagues to meet Guru Gobind Singh and proceeded towards South along with Guru Gobind Singh⁷ but Guru Gobind Singh, near the area of Baghour (Rajasthan) asked Bhai Mani Singh and his colleagues to go back. After returning to Amritsar and feeling sad at the separation of Guru Gobind Singh, Bhai Mani Singh tried to console Sikhs by composing

³ Rana Ranjit Singh, *Hazuri Shaheed*, Chatar Singh Jeevan Singh, Amritsar, 2015, P-197.

⁴ Dilgeer Harjinder Singh, *Sikh Itihaas Vich Ajj Da Din*, Sikh University Press, Amritsar, 2010, P-232.

⁵ Batish Dharam Chand, *Sikh Dharam Te Shaheedi Parampra*, Singh Brother, Amritsar, 1979, P-181.

⁶ Singh Sewa, *Shaheed Bilas Bhai Mani Singh*, Giani Garja Singh (ed.), Punjabi Sahit Academy, Ludhiana, 1961, P-31.

⁷ Jaggi Rattan Singh, *Bhai Mani Singh: Jiwan Ate Rachna*, P-8.

many special incidents and played an important role in connecting Sikhs and members of other communities with Sikh shrines (*Gurudwaras*).⁸ Due to the policy of love and equality, people from far off places started coming to the public court to pay obeisance and taking bath in holy pool. That way, Bhai Mani Singh did service in the right way. After spending two and half years there, people from far off places converged at Amritsar on the day of *Baisakhi* and congregations were held. Although *Meenia* (A community name) had left Amritsar but at that time, Sodhi Niranjana Rai of Sodhi community who was the son of Sodhi Hari, his *Mukhtiar Chuhar Mal Khatri* who lived in Amritsar, had two sons; Mohkam Singh and Ramu Mal. Mohkam Singh was a baptised Sikh, so he worked as per his father's dictates. Some Sikhs tried to buy some mulberries from Ramu Mal but he refused to give and rather used some derogatory words for Guru Gobind Singh. Furious at that, some Sikhs beat him up in the orchard itself. The caretakers of the orchard immediately informed the incident to Chuhar Mal.⁹ Infuriated in anger and in order to take revenge from Sikhs, he decided to capture the Sikhs and despite counselling by Bhai Mani Singh, went to meet Nazam Aslam Khan of Lahore. During that, Suba called Bhai Mani Singh to Lahore. Bhai Mani Singh after thoroughly discussing the matter, he sent Bhai Tara Singh to Suba in Lahore.¹⁰ There, *Meenia* stayed put on their stand and kept instigating Suba against Sikhs. Surat Singh of Lahore and other Sikhs intervened to resolve that tangle but the stalemate could not be resolved and Bhai Tara Singh informed everything to Bhai Mani Singh on his return. After knowing about the return of Chuhar Mal to Amritsar, Bhai Mani Singh called him but he did not come and Bhai Mani Singh was informed that Chuhar Mal was busy making preparations to attack Amritsar. On knowing that, Bhai Mani Singh made consultations and motivated Sikhs to punish Chuhar Mal.¹¹ After getting beaten from Sikhs and losing his home, Chuhar Mal went to Har Sahai for help at Patti; on the other side, Bhai Mani Singh summoned Sikhs to Amritsar by writing letters, to be ready for the battle. To help Chuhar Mal, Har Sahai also attacked Amritsar in which he had to face defeat. After that battle, Chuhar Mal went to Nazam Aslam Khan of Lahore and cried before him for help. Both of them, after consultations, sent a *Jat* named *Deva* along with army from Lahore to attack Amritsar. Here, Bhai Mani Singh motivated the Sikhs to be ready for the battle. The battle took place in the year 1709 and enemy was

⁸ Singh Sahib, Kirpal Singh, *Shri Harimander Sahib Da Sunehri Itihaas*, S.G.P.C., Amritsar, 2010 P-138.

⁹ Dilgeer Harjinder Singh, *Sikh Itihas*, Research Board, Amritsar, 1986, P-46.

¹⁰ Jaggi Rattan Singh, *Bhai Mani Singh- Jiwan Ate Rachna*, P-4.

¹¹ Singh Sewa, *Shaheed Bilas Bhai Mani Singh*, Giani Garja Singh (ed.), P-34.

defeated. Both Chuhar Mal and Deva saved themselves by running away.¹² The self-esteem of Sikhs increased after that battle. On the other side, the victories of Banda Singh Bahadur considerably enhanced the courage of Sikhs. During that, Baba Banda Singh Bahadur moved towards hills. On the occasion of *Hola Mohalla* festival in the year 1711, Guru Gobind Singh and Baba Ajit Singh, along with some companions, came to Amritsar from Delhi and made the Sikhs aware about the then prevailing situation and returned to Delhi after cautioning Sikhs for the future. Bhai Mani Singh, understanding the circumstances, left from Amritsar and stayed in the area of *Jhang* for sometime.¹³ Accordingly, accepting the version of *Shaheed Bilas*, Bhai Mani Singh served as the third head priest in the court of *Harimandir Sahib*, after Baba Budha and Bhai Gurdas. In fact, Bhai Mani Singh was such a Sikh scholar who raised the morale of the Sikhs during the time of crisis and to infuse spirit among them; to strengthen the organisation, motivated the people to reach Amritsar on the occasion of *Visakhi* and *Diwali*. By that, the Sikh sect embarked upon the path of development.

Bhai Mani Singh while performing his service in a perfect manner also played an important role in forging unity among Sikh sects. Abdul Samad Khan Turani captured Baba Banda Bahadur and brought him to Delhi. Badshah was brought to Delhi as a reward for that. He was sent to Lahore by appointing him as the administrative as a reward by the Emperor of Delhi. After the death of Emperor Farukh Shear, he started opposing *Takt Khalsa* out of ego. As per the promise of the Emperor, properties which were exempted earlier got confiscated. Due to that, many well off Sikhs by discarding the Royal comforts went back to their homes. Some others managed themselves by residing in Sikh shrines. Others got recruited themselves in the army of *Rajputs*. Some prominent Sikh *Sardars* started residing in their homes by taking along 100-200 Sikhs.¹⁴ When many Sikhs became dislocated like that, about five hundred Sikhs who worked in Lahore at one rupee daily, their wages too were halved, therefore most of them left their jobs. Others, who were poor continued working at half salary; Abdul Samad Khan Nazam of Lahore then observed that the space was vacant. After the death of main leader of Sikhs, Banda Bahadur, it was deemed necessary to break the Sikhs also. After many such thoughts, Nazam decided that firstly double tax would be collected. Secondly, an order was proclaimed for the attention of the public that those people whose property or goods were ever looted by the Sikhs, they could submit their applications. Those Sikh villagers who never resorted to looting rather managed their household by doing

¹² *Ibid*, P-35.

¹³ Dilgeer Harjinder Singh, *Guru De Sher*, P-320.

¹⁴ Singh Gobind, *Itihas Guru Khalsa*, Mai Sewa Bazar, Amritsar, 1991, P-285.

agriculture at home, their properties were also confiscated. During that repression, some *Hindus* also submitted applications against Sikhs for looting their properties. There was no Sikh in Punjab against whom 5-6 such complaints were not registered. Any Sikh, against whom case of murder was registered, was killed without any enquiry. Atrocities started being committed on Sikhs almost daily. Some Sikhs inhabited themselves in *Rajputana* by leaving Punjab. Afterwards, the government started demolishing Sikh shrines. On the other hand, Sikh soldiers in *Rajput* army received the complete news of demolition of Sikh *Gurudwaras* and government repression on them. Sikhs, after reassembling themselves started their march towards Punjab. Sikhs residing in Punjab were already flexing their muscles. They all jointly attacked the stooges of the government and spared none in the killing spree. Those, who had got the Sikhs oppressed by making false complaints against them were selectively killed. Mayhem spreaded in the whole country. Sikhs added hundreds of prisoners in their entourage by break opening the *Jails*. Any *Muslim*, who came in the sight of Sikhs, could not escape alive. Many prominent *Muslim* priest was burnt alive. For many prominent *Muslim* priest while preaching *Muslim* faith became the cause of trouble for many *Hindus*, it was like eating raw pork forcibly meaning thereby that Sikhs also did not show any lenience to those who committed excesses upon them but a decent *Muslim* was appropriately respected. The children of Muslims started scaring at the very mention of a Sikh and many *Muslims* went to hiding to save their lives. Any Sikh whose property was confiscated, he recouped it. The rulers thought upon many arrangements to control the Sikhs but nothing could be done against the enthusiasm of the Sikhs.

When the Sikhs completely assumed their control over the whole of Punjab, they revived Diwali fair in Amritsar which was stopped by the government. For this, edict was sent throughout by Sikhs that they should come to Amritsar on the occasion of *Diwali* and enhance the grandeur of celebrations by converging there. After listening to the edict, a feeling of excitement developed among the Sikhs and teams of devotees from all around, started converging at the festival. Fair was celebrated with great fervour. Money in hundreds of rupees and offerings of various kinds were made in *Harimandir Sahib*. A dispute started among ordinary Sikhs and Guru Sikhs over the distributions of presents.¹⁵ One sect was of *Takt Khalsa* which considered *Guru Granth Sahib* as the Guru after the death of Guru Gobind Singh whose leader was Baba Kahan Singh; second sect was of *Bandai Singhs* who considered Baba Banda Singh Bahadur as the eleventh Guru of Sikhs and the head of that

¹⁵ *Ibid*, PP-286-287.

sect was Mahant Amar Singh.¹⁶ When Mata Sundri came to know of that dispute, she wrote a letter from Delhi to Bhai Mani Singh to resolve the dispute. One day, the head of *Bandai Sikh* sect, Amar Singh came to *Harimandir Sahib* on a chariot along with his companions to forcibly occupy it.¹⁷ Upon that, Bhai Mani Singh, by calling a congregation of all Sikhs, suggested to settle the dispute between *Takt Khalsa* and *Bandai Khalsa* through voting. According to him, by writing the slogan *Fateh Darshan* of *Bandai Khalsa* on one slip and *Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa* of *Takt Khalsa* on the other, those would be submerged in the pool of Amritsar. Whichever slip comes out first, would be the winner and the other one would concede defeat.¹⁸ By doing so, the slip of *Takt Khalsa* came out first.¹⁹ So *Bandai Khalsa* accepted their defeat but Amar Singh did not agree. A large number of Sikhs accepted the defeat and shifted to *Tat Khalsa* by defecting from *Bandai Khalsa* but the leader of *Bandai Khalsa*, Mahant Singh, remained adamant that they would still not accept defeat. Ultimately, Bhai Mani Singh, in order to placate him and arrive at on a consensus, put up one more condition, as per which the wrestlers of both the factions were readied for a match. It was decided that the wrestler of whichever faction wins; the rival faction would have to approve that victory.²⁰ This wrestling match was held opposite the throne of *Akal* minaret between Mohri Singh of *Takt Khalsa* and wrestler Sangat Singh of *Bandai Khalsa* in which Mohri Singh of *Tat Khalsa* remained victorious. After that victory, *Bandai Khalsa* merged with the philosophy of *Takt Khalsa*²¹ but Mahant Amar Singh remained adamant and was ultimately killed in a clash and *Bandai Khalsa* members who were with him, they went away after leaving *Harimandir Sahib*. Like that, the mutual conflicts between *Bandai Khalsa* and *Takt Khalsa* ended and a feeling of unity again established between them. The name of *Bandai Khalsa* alienated from Sikh history from that very day.²² After resolving the conflict between *Bandai Khalsa* and *Takt Khalsa* with his wisdom, Bhai Mani Singh informed Mata Sundari about that and again connected both the factions with Guru's shrine. Under the leadership of Mata Sundari, Bhai Mani Singh saved the Sikh religion from vanishing.

After observing his intelligence in the field of education, Bhai Mani Singh was accorded the award of Giani (Knowledgeable) by Guru Gobind Singh. Bhai Mani Singh, for

¹⁶ Pall S.J.S, *Atharwi Sadi Da Sikh Itihas*, Mai sewa Bazar, Amritsar, 2001, P-65.

¹⁷ Aulakh Gurcharan Singh, *Shromni Shaheed*, Mai Sewa Bazar, Amritsar, 2000, P-104.

¹⁸ Chandan Kirpal Singh, *Sikh Phulwari*, Field Ganj, Ludhiana, 1982, P-25.

¹⁹ Batish Dharam Chand, *Sikh Dharam Te Shaheedi Parampra*, P-181.

²⁰ Dilgeer Harjinder Singh, *Guru de Sher*, P-321.

²¹ Giani Atma Singh, *Shaheed Bhai Mani Singh Jiwan Atte Rachna*, Mai Herran Gate, Jalandhar, 1955, P-54.

²² Pall S.J.S, *Atharwi Sadi Da Sikh Itihas*, P-64.

his high knowledge, performed that duty in an efficient manner. The process of describing the meaning of *Guru Granth Sahib's* verses which started during the time of Guru Gobind Singh was called *Giani Sampardai Parnali* (The process of explaining meaning of religious verses). During war, when Guru Gobind Singh reached Malwa region, he camped at *Sabo ki Talwandi*. Here, he had performed many important tasks. Firstly the verses of his father Guru Tegh Bahadur were entered in *Guru Granth Sahib*; that task was performed by Bhai Mani Singh by sitting beside Guru Gobind Singh. The second task that tenth Guru undertook was to open a *Taksaal* (Mint) of explanation of Guru's hymns in which he gave the meanings of *Guru Granth Sahib*. Bhai Mani Singh, along with his 48 companions, read out and listened to the meanings of *Guru Granth Sahib* from Guru Gobind Singh.²³ Bhai Mani Singh had explained those meanings among the people. Wherever Bhai Mani Singh reached for proliferation of Guru's verses, Sikh devotees always stood up to welcome him. People used to attain knowledge from him. Every single explanation of Guru's verses by Bhai Mani Singh, was full of knowledge which enriched the Sikhs with a new thinking. Likewise, Bhai Mani Singh enlightened many others with the meanings of *Gurubani*. This tradition became such a mint which came to be known as *Giani Samparda* among Sikhs, the pioneer of which was Bhai Mani Singh. Bhai Mani Singh and other Sikhs also used to listen like students and read out and memorise the meanings of *Gurubani*.²⁴ In the task of explaining the meaning of words and that of *Gurubani*, Guru Gobind Singh considered Bhai Mani Singh above other Sikhs and asked him to continue the task of imparting education under all circumstances. As per the permission of Guru Gobind Singh, Bhai Mani Singh, by residing in Amritsar, started the community mint of the meanings of *Guru Granth*.²⁵ Today the branches of *Gian Sampadai* process initiated by Bhai Mani Singh have taken the shape of big institutions. Like the blood of a martyr never goes waste which a Sikh sheds for the sake of history, he is called a martyr.²⁶ Likewise, Bhai Mani Singh spent all his life for saving the unity, integrity and honour of Sikh religion and left a big mark in history by his martyrdom. Bhai Mani created a new and unique example of sacrifice by getting his body chopped in two pieces. After some time of forging peace between the two warring factions by Bhai Mani Singh, suddenly an incident happened in Delhi in which Baba Ajit Singh along with 60 other Sikhs was martyred in Delhi. Thus a catastrophe struck the Sikhs from all sides. Sikhs moved

²³ Kohli Surinder Singh, *Punjabi Sahit Da Itihas*, Bhasha Vibhag, Punjabi University, Patiala, P-216.

²⁴ Sagoo Harbans Kaur, *Sikh Shahadat Da Sankalp*, P-179.

²⁵ Kaur Rajinder, *Bhai Mani Singh- Jeevan Atte Shahadat*, Better Choice Educational, Jalandhar, 2015, P-24.

²⁶ Giani Niranjan Singh, *Anokhe Shaheed*, Gurudwara Gazette, S.G.P.C., Amritsar, 1982, P-43.

to hills and other areas.²⁷ Bhai Mani Singh, despite all the risks, offered solace to the Sikhs by staying in Amritsar and raised their moral in the wake of lurking dangers facing them. At that time, Bhai Mani Singh had attained the age of 90 years. There was a lull for some time after that incident. The festival of *Diwali* of the year 1733 had come near. To celebrate the festival of *Diwali*, Bhai Mani Singh went to Lahore for arranging fair on the occasion and had discussion with Zakaria Khan. Zakaria Khan demanded a tax of ten thousand rupees for giving permission for holding the fair.²⁸ As per the condition of Zakaria Khan, Bhai Mani Singh by promising to pay the tax money after the conclusion of the Fair came back to Amritsar. Invitation letters were written to all Sikhs requesting them to come to Amritsar to participate in the fair of *Diwali*. As the news of *Diwali* fair spread all around, Sikhs started marching towards Amritsar with great enthusiasm. As the *Diwali* fair drew nearer, Sikh traders, devotees and monks from the country and abroad, started converging at Amritsar. On the other side, the state of Lahore did not abide by its promise. They thought that on the occasion of fair, prominent Sikhs from far and wide would converge in Amritsar; so not much effort would be required to arrest them; otherwise it would be difficult to have such a congregation at one place. Considering that, thousands of soldiers were despatched to encircle Amritsar 15 days prior to *Diwali*.²⁹ Bhai Mani Singh questioned the motive of sending so much force when there was a permission to hold the fair. The state of Lahore sent a reply that the force was only to manage the fair. Who will be responsible in case a dispute or a skirmish occurs and the police were not able to manage it? So the arrangement had been made in advance. But the Sikhs had prior knowledge about the dishonesty of Lahore state. All the Sikhs who came to Amritsar slowly moved out and asked the incoming ones to return, informing them about the deceit of the army. Others were stopped through letters. Thus all Sikhs stopped moving to the fair and those who had come, slowly moved out.³⁰ But those who could not receive the message, comprising about 2-4 hundred monks and beggars were seen around *Harimandir Sahib*. Thus the fair of *Diwali* could not be held. Therefore, even the fixed fee could not be collected. On the other side, after *Diwali*, *Suba* of Lahore ordered to recover the fee of the fair from Bhai Mani Singh but Bhai Mani Singh did not have any money with him. He was arrested and sent to Lahore. Zakaria Khan asked him to pay the prescribed amount of tax, but Bhai Mani Singh said that he could have paid the tax if the fair had been

²⁷ Jaggi Rattan Singh, *Bhai Mani Singh: Jiwan ate Rachna*, P-12.

²⁸ Singh Ganda, *Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2011, P-26.

²⁹ Batish Dharam Chand, *Sikh Dharam te Sikh Parampara*, P-183.

³⁰ Dilgeer Harjinder Singh, *Sikh Itihaas*, P-48.

held.³¹ Despite that, *Suba* did not listen to any plea and firstly tortured Bhai Mani Singh and finally when Zakaria Khan observed that there was no hope of recovering the tax, he asked Bhai Mani Singh to accept Islam and in case of non-recovery of tax, ordered to butcher him into pieces. While accepting that punishment, Bhai Mani Singh said that he was ready to sacrifice umpteen lives for Sikhism. After hearing the order, Mayhem spread in Lahore city. Bhai Mani Singh was taken to the royal fort for butchering him in to pieces. Finally Bhai Mani Singh attained martyrdom in the year 1734. Some devout Sikhs collected pieces of his body and cremated him near Masti Gate. They built a majestic Sikh temple there in his memory which still lies near Masti Gate of Lahore which is known with the name of *Shaheed Ganj*. Many other Sikhs were arrested along with Bhai Mani Singh and given severe punishments. One of Bhai Mani Singh's companion, Bhai Diwan Singh was ordered to be cut with a scissor; Bhai Gulzar Singh was tortured to death.³²



³¹ Singh Mohan, *Khoon Sahidan Da*, Sikh Missionary College, Ludhiana, 1984, P-46.

³² Aulakh Gurcharan Singh, *Shromini Shaheed*, PP-105-106.