

# The Story of the Ganga Sagar: Symbol of Love & Unity

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In 1705 Guru Gobind Singh Ji went to Machiwara after leaving Anandpur Sahib. During those severe hardship days some Rajas refused even to offer help to Guru Sahib due to the fear of death as Aurangzeb was after the life of Guru Sahib and his family. When Guru Sahib reached Raikot state, the Muslim Chief Rai Kalha welcomed him and felt honoured in offering his services to Guru Sahib as his guest for as long as he wanted to stay. Guru Ji spent a few days with Rai Kalha. It was in Raikot that Guru Sahib got the most tragic news of the death of his two minor sons and his mother. The news was brought from Sarhind by Noora Mahi who was deputed by Rai Kalha for the seva of Guru Sahib.

Guru Sahib during his stay asked Noora Mahi to serve him milk in Ganga Sagar which was a part of his personal belongings. Noora Mahi said that his buffalo did not give milk and even if it did, the milk will not stay in Ganga Sagar as it had holes in it. Guru Sahib told him to utter the name of God and start milking the buffalo. To the surprise and amazement of Noora Mahi, the buffalo gave milk and it did not leak out from the Ganga Sagar. Before leaving Raikot, in recognition and in appreciation of the services and hospitality extended by Rai Kalha, a Muslim Chief, who risked his own and his family's lives, Guru Gobind Singh Ji presented Ganga Sagar and a sword to Rai Kalha as personal gifts.

Till 1947 the Ganga Sagar was displayed for darshan in Raikot, Distt Ludhiana by Khan Bahadur Rai Inayat Khan.

The present owner of Ganga Sagar is Rai Azizullah, grandson of Khan Bahadur Rai Inayat Khan and the heir of the Rai family who have kept this sacred gift of Guru Gobind Singh Ji with great respect and care for almost 300 years.

The story of the Ganga Sagar became a part of my consciousness in late 1940s when, after the partition of Punjab in 1947, my family settled in Raikot. The occasion was the annual Gurpurab, celebrated at Gurdwara Tahlianaa Saheb, Raikot for three days (January 2-4 every year), to mark the arrival of Guru Gobind Singh Ji and his entourage in Raikot in 1705.

The Gurpurab is, as it has been for many years, a major event in the local calendar and attracts large crowds from near and far. *Deewans* are held throughout the three days and well into the nights and a large number of prominent Punjab poets, *kavishars*, *raagis* and *dhadis* come to take part. The finale is marked by a very impressive *jaloos*, which passes through the main bazaar of the city before returning to the Gurdwara, after completing a journey of some six kilometers.

I learnt then that before the formation of Pakistan in 1947, one of the highlights of the *jaloos* was the public display of the Ganga Sagar by the Rai family. The Rai family migrated to Pakistan in 1947 and took the Ganga Sagar with them. There was no picture of the Ganga Sagar at the Gurdwara. A large inscription on the front wall of the Gurdwara describes in some detail the events associated with the Guru's arrival in Raikot on 2 January 1705, his being looked after by the Rai family, the news of the *Shaheedi* of the two younger Sahebzade in Sirhind being brought to him in Raikot, and his gift of the Ganga Sagar to Rai Kallah at the end of his stay on 5 January 1705.

I saw the Ganga Sagar for the first time in September 1996, when Rai Azizullah, the present head of the Rai family, brought it to Melbourne for a public display at the Nanaksar Isher Darbar Thaat. It was indeed a memorable occasion. Thousands came to see and to touch the Ganga Sagar. Some wanted to lift it in their own hands, turn it around and inspect

closely the many holes in it, as if to confirm that they were indeed there.

Rai Azizullah also won the hearts of the crowds through his humility, sincerity and respect for the Guru, the Ganga Sagar and the Sikh community. I particularly remember him saying that for him the significance of the Ganga Sagar is entirely in the fact that it is an object that had received the touch of Guru Gobind Singh's *pavitar* hands. He then went on to say that as far as he and his family are concerned, the significance of a gift from the Guru would have been exactly the same if the Guru had given them the gift of a pot of clay instead.

The point made by Rai Azizullah is very important indeed. The real significance of the Ganga Sagar is not in its holes, nor in any miracle that is sometimes attached to it. The real significance is in what the Ganga Sagar represents. It represents an appreciation of fearless love and respect shown by the Rai Family towards the Guru. Even more remarkably, the Rai family did this against the obvious risk of serious reprisals from rulers of the day. In this sense, the Ganga Sagar is a symbol of love. It reminds us, and will continue to remind all those who are fortunate enough to see it in the future, of love that transcends the artificial boundaries of religion, race or caste. It is, therefore, a symbol of love that embraces the entire humanity and expresses the same one-ness of humanity that was the essence of Guru Gobind Singh's life and teachings.

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