

Pak MP brings home Guru Gobind Singh Ji's relic

Manraj Grewal

He was six and had just lost his father, his only surviving parent, when his grandmother, Aziza Bibi, first told him about, the family's treasure - the *ganga sagar*, a copper urn gifted by Guru Gobind Singh. "She said, 'don't worry, we're blessed by the Guru.' Instantly, I felt better," he recalls.

Fortyeight years later, Rai Azizullah Khan, a Pakistani MP, was in India with the Guru's relic. It's the first time that the urn has been brought to India after Partition. And the Muslim League leader is quick to underline the symbolism in this season of Indo-Pak thaw. "It's a symbol of humanity that transcends religion," he says.

Folklore has it that Khan's ancestor, Rai Kalha III, the Muslim ruler of Raikot, played host to Guru Gobind Singh while he was battling the Mughals in 1705. It was from Rai's servant, Noora Mahi, that the Guru learnt about the martyrdom of his two younger sons. Later, a grateful Guru gifted the Rai a sword, *ganga sagar* and *rehel* (a wooden stand). While the British took away the sword, and termited the *rehel*, the *ganga sagar* was lovingly preserved by the Rai family. Partition took Raikot away from them, but couldn't rob them of the urn.

"Some elderly Sikhs did request my grandfather, Rai Inayat Khan, to leave it behind. But he said it was the Guru's gift, and he couldn't dream of parting with it," he says. Today, Khan, who has kept it in a locker in London after getting it insured-he declines to quote the sum, saying even the insurer called the relic priceless - is equally passionate about the urn.

"Yesterday, when a woman asked me to pass it on to a Sikh body, I asked her how she would feel if I were to give away her gift to someone else," he says. "This is a divine bounty, I can't tell you how honoured I feel to possess it." Azizullah Khan, realised the importance of the *ganga sagar* for Sikhs during his travels abroad, soon after inheriting it at the age of 24. Keen to know more, he even learnt to read and write in Gurmukhi. Then, during one of his visits to London in 1993, he decided to make public his ownership of the urn. He thought it would take some time for people to cross-check his version, but everything fell into place within minutes after he addressed the congregation at the Havelock Road gurdwara in Southall. Giani Jaswant Singh Parwana, former head priest of Durbar Sahib who was present there, asked him whether he knew Rai Inayat Khan. "When I said I was his grandson, he hugged me and told the congregation that they should have tracked me down, not the other way round," he recalls.

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