

Tenth Guru's Unique Relic: The Incomparable "Ganga Sagar"*

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Leading a delegation of 27 Pakistani law makers, Rai Aziz Ullah Khan visited the historic Tahlianna Sahib Gurdwara and the family's ancestral Haveli in Raikot on April 4, 2004. The delegation was received by the current populace with a great deal of love, affection and deep respect.

I WAS ELECTED AS A MEMBER of Pakistan's National Assembly (MP) in October 2002. As expected, my Pakistani friends celebrated my election victory with much pleasure. However, they were pleasantly surprised to learn that as soon as the news of my election reached my ancestral town, Raikot (in District Ludhiana) in East Punjab, the inhabitants there, too, offered prayers at Raikot's historic Gurdwara Tahlianna Sahib by way of thanksgiving and distributed sweets.

I regard myself as enormously fortunate since I am the only Member of Pakistan's National Assembly whose election victory was celebrated equally by people residing in both sides of Punjab. Nevertheless, I believe there must be people on both sides who may not know the core reason for this shared expression of happiness. **It is for this reason that I regard it important to provide information by way of background about my family.**

In 1705 A. D., the Tenth Sikh Guru, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji was camped and rested in the jungle of Machhiwara. Two muslim devotees, Gani Khan and Nabi Khan, were there to serve the Guru. Guru Sahib was getting ready to take the garb of the venerable Muslim saint, *Uch da Pir* while the two Muslim courtiers were decorating the covered palauquin with adornments to carry the Guru to safety.

Shortly before the above episode and after leaving Anandpur Sahib's fort, the two elder sons of the Guru, **Baba Ajit Singh and Baba Jujhar Singh had achieved martyrdom** while displaying unparalleled valour fighting a fierce battle at the fortress of Chamkaur. **The two younger sons and their mother, Mata Gujri, got separated** from the Guru while crossing the flooded Sarsa river. Furthermore, Aurangzeb's forces were in hot pursuit of the Guru on the one hand, and several devotees, including Mahant Kirpal Das had parted company from the Guru, on the other hand.

This is the backdrop to the arrival of the tenth Guru in the erstwhile Raikot Riyasat (Princely State). Rai Kallha was the Nawab of the Raikot State at that time. As soon as he learnt about Guru's arrival in his State, he came to visit the Guru with reverence, offered him a warm welcome and extended a cordial invitation to the Guru to stay with him.

Guru Sahib accepted the invitation and asked Rai Kallha to obtain news about Mata Gujri and his two younger sons as they left Sirhind. Rai Kallha immediately deputed his **trusted emissary, Noore Mahi, to proceed to Sirhind** for this purpose

The emissary returned with the tragic news soon thereafter that both the sons were bricked alive, thereby achieving martyrdom and that Mata Gujri also breathed her last.

Rai Kallha served the Tenth Guru with great devotion during 17th to 19th December 1705 AD. thereby proving himself to be a truthful and pious Muslim who effectively differentiated between the fanatically brutal aggressor and the innocent victim of persecution. Rai Kallha displayed unparalleled moral courage since undoubtedly the Mughal forces could easily destroy Raikot Riyasat, and the lives of the Rai family were themselves in mortal danger. The Guru was enormously pleased by this selfless and chivalrous service, and while departing Raikot State, he presented the following gifts, as his personal mementoes to Rai Kallha:

1. **Ganga Sagar:** A metallic pitcher, sanctified by Guru's touch and being in Guru's personal use. This was the same long necked pitcher which the Guru had used at the site of Gurdwara Tahlianna to drink milk. The legend has it that the buffaloes had been milked for the day in the morning. Nevertheless, when Noore Mahi went to do the Guru's bidding, a young buffalo gave ample milk and, although the pitcher had holes, even a drop of milk did not leak.
2. **Siri Sahib (Kharag or the long Kirpan):** This sword gifted by Guru Sahib to Rai Kallha stayed in our family for approximately 150 years. However, in 1854 AD the Britishers took possession of this sword from Rai Imam Baksh, the 5th generation descendent of Rai Kallha, through sheer might of their imperial power.
3. **The Wooden receptacle to hold the holy book while reading:** This did not last long because of its wooden construction.

From 1705 to 1947, 'Ganga Sagar' stayed in Raikot. Raikot is situated in District Ludhiana and was founded by Rai Ahmed in 1648 AD. Before the partition of the subcontinent, the leaders of the Rai family at the time and my grand-father, Rai Anayat Khan who was also an Honorary Magistrate, took the responsibility of the safe custody and the upkeep of Ganga Sagar. Once each year, Rai Anayat Khan used to arrange viewing (*darshan*) of Ganga Sagar in his Haveli (walled mansion), to the congregation which used to come from Gurdwara Tahlianna. I have had the opportunity of meeting several individuals, now quite aged, in many countries, who have had *darshan* of Ganga Sagar as displayed each year by my grand-father over the years. When I now display 'Ganga Sagar' in these countries myself, the manner in which these older people show their happiness by seeing 'Ganga Sagar' in the same original condition they had viewed years before, is a matter of enormous satisfaction for me too.

At the time of the partition in 1947, when Rai Anayat Khan migrated to Pakistan from Raikot, the priceless item that accompanied him and his other family members, was the 'Ganga Sagar' gifted by Guru Gobind Singh ji to the family. Rai Anayat Khan was the only son of his parents. He, too, had only one son, Rai Fakir Ullah. **It is certainly a miracle of nature that I am also the only son of Rai Fakir Ullah and I, too, have only one son, Rai Mohammed Ali.**

My grand-father died in 1953 when I was two years old. My mother passed away when I was four, and my father, Rai Fakir Ullah Khan, when I was 6 ½ years old. After that it was my old grand-mother, Aziza Begum, who brought me up and

arranged for my education. She is the one who provided me with details of our family history and about Ganga Sagar. It was through her that I learnt that before the partition of the subcontinent, Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims lived in peace and harmony with each other. ***In addition, she told me that our family was always the recipient of unparalleled love and blessings by the Sikh sangats and that they used to come to our Haveli with respectful devotion to have darshan of the Ganga Sagar. After repeatedly hearing about these inspiring events, I was always eager since my childhood to visit my ancestral place and to meet the current inhabitants there. The thought also occurred to me that as soon as possible, I should also provide the Sikh sangat with the important information about the fact that Guru Gobind Singh's unique and priceless gift, Ganga Sagar, bestowed to our family, currently exists in the same pristine and secure condition; and to reiterate to the sangat our eternal pride in our forefather, a fearless Muslim leader, Rai Kallha of the former Raikot state who had the privilege of serving Guru Gobind Singh Ji at a particularly dangerous time in Sikh history.***

While looking after the security and the upkeep of Ganga Sagar, my grandmother was always concerned and mindful about the responsibility of turning over the custody of the same to me when I was old enough to fully comprehend the importance of this priceless gift bestowed by Guru Gobind Singh and, secondly, to make sure that I would be fully capable of maintaining complete reverence and devotion while I become the custodian of Guru's gift. I remember distinctly that when I was rather young, my grand-mother would not allow me to even touch the Ganga Sagar. She passed away in 1975. Whereas she could not fulfil her dream of getting me married with her "own hands", the fact remains that after her death my marriage took place in the family she had wanted me to marry, namely, with the daughter of Rai Mahammed Iqbal of Talwandi Rai, a village contiguous to Raikot.

While taking care of the Ganga Sagar, I was fully aware about its historical importance and its respectful reverence. However, the relationship between India and Pakistan had not yet improved to the point that I could venture to arrange for unrestricted viewing of Ganga Sagar to the Sikh *sangats* in both the countries. Nevertheless, I considered it as my obligation to let the Sikh communities know about its secure custody. Therefore, when I had an opportunity to visit UK and Canada in 1993 for personal reasons, I provided information concerning Ganga Sagar for the first time to Sikh congregations assembled in South-Hall Gurdwara in UK and the Khalsa Dewan Society, Ross Street Gurdwara in Vancouver, Canada. At both these Gurdwaras, several older individuals met me who knew my family, particularly my grand-father, Rai Anayat Khan rather well. Also they have had the privilege of viewing Ganga Sagar before partition.

After 1947, it was in 1994 that, for the first time, I arranged for viewing of Ganga Sagar to the Sikh Sangat in Hayes, UK. This also provided me an opportunity to witness for the first time the extreme reverence of the Sikh Sangat for Guru Gobind Singh and because of Ganga Sagar, the love and affection they had for our family. We would remember throughout our lives the affection that the Sikh *Sangats* displayed and the blessings they showered on me and my only son, Rai Mohammed Ali.

I express my infinite gratitude to Allah for the respect and honour that I and my family received because of the noble deed of our forefather, Rai Kallha and because of the 'Ganga Sagar' sanctified by the Guru's touch. My mind is full of respect for all the Gurdwaras situated throughout the world.

Whenever I have been lovingly invited by any Sikh organization, and provided I have time, I have made every effort to fulfill the desire of the community in the particular country or the city. As a result, I have been able to arrange *darshan* of Ganga Sagar for the Sikh *Sangats* settled in many countries. However, Sikh *Sangats* residing in India have been unable to have a glimpse of the venerable Ganga Sagar after 1947 although the *Sangats* in India have a greater right to be able to view the 10th Guru's peerless relic. I would therefore be enormously pleased to arrange unrestricted *Darshan* of the Ganga Sagar with proper *maryada* in India whenever I get a suitable occasion to do that.

Tricentenary Celebrations of the Birth of the Khalsa in Anandpur Sahib

By virtue of being a descendant of the lineage of Rai Kallha Ji and also being the present custodian of Ganga Sagar, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), Parkash Singh Badal's government, and PPCC president at the time, Capt. Amarinder Singh, (now chief minister) extended invitation to me to participate in the unparalleled 300 year celebration at Anandpur Sahib of the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh. They honoured me with Siri Sahib, *Siropas* and a Gold Medal memento. The manner in which I was awarded these honours in the presence of lacs of Sikh devotees who had come from all over the world has left unforgettable memories which constitute priceless treasure of my life. After the Anandpur Sahib Samagam, I was privileged to pay my obeisance at Gurdwara Fateh Garh Sahib and Gurdwara Thanda Burj, both of which represent our shared past history. While visiting these Gurdwaras, I recreated in my mind's eye the entire episode of the martyrdom of the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh.

I also got an opportunity during this trip to visit my ancestral place, Raikot. Before entering this town, I paid my obeisance at Gurdwara Tahlianna Sahib where Guru Gobind Singh had stayed before setting foot in Raikot Riyasat. From this Gurdwara, I went to Raikot where the inhabitants warmly received me with flower necklaces, and joined me in the form of a procession in various bazaars of the city. I was also taken in this manner to the ancestral Haveli of Rai Inayat Khan. The current owners/occupants of this Haveli are Tajinder Singh and Jaswinder Singh, sons of S. Lal Singh. That day, the leading political and religious personalities had arranged for a sumptuous meal for approximately 500 people. I am enormously grateful to all the religious and political leaders, and the other inhabitants of the region, for the manner in which they accorded me a warm welcome and honoured me with their love during this historic trip. I have a heartfelt desire to visit Raikot again accompanied by my 15 year old only son, Rai Mohammed Ali, and with other members of my family.

The current atmosphere of peace and friendship that is developing between India and Pakistan and the improvement in relations between the two countries is highly laudable. I strongly wish that this developing mutual affection and cordiality increases further so that people of both the countries have unrestricted ability to freely move and visit the two countries whenever they so desire. In this connection,

it is incumbent on the two Governments to simplify the visa procedures to accomplish the above.

Persons desirous of obtaining additional information concerning Ganga Sagar and the Rai family (Kallha Rai, etc), may consult the following sources:

1. **Mahan Kosh** By Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha
2. **Suraj Parkash** by Bhai Santokh Singh
3. **Encyclopedia of Sikhism** by Dr. Harbans Singh
4. **Sikh Reference Book** by Dr. Harjinder Sigh Dilgeer
5. **Rajas of Punjab (1870 AD)** by Lepel H. Griffin
6. **Chiefs of Punjab** (Editions 1890, 1909 & 1940)
7. **Ludhiana District Government Gazetteer** (1904)
8. **Raikot Survey Pustak** by Kapoor Singh Ghuman, Bhasha Vibhag (1971)

After the Tricentenary celebrations, and during occasions at which Darshan of Ganga Sagar have been arranged, several members of the present *Sangat* have expressed the desire that Ganga Sagar should be installed at such a place where the *Sangat* has unrestricted opportunity to have its *Darshan*. I have had the same thought in my mind for a long time and I have discussed this matter with my friends in order to make appropriate arrangement to accomplish the above objective.

GANGA SAGAR IS A SYMBOL OF LOVE OF HUMANITY, TOLERANCE AND RESPECT FOR EACH OTHER.

I pray to Allah that the expression of sharing of love for humanity manifested by Guru Sahib during his visit to Raikot may continue for ever. Amen!

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