

The Patriotic Namdhari Sikh

Host to Netaji Subhas

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Neither ripe age, nor a gap of more than six decades have been able to dull the memory of a great day in the life of Sardar Sewa Singh Namdhari. It was at his place in Bangkok in 1940 that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose came to interact with the local Indian community.

They came in hordes to meet the charismatic man. Namdhari's father, Sardar Pratap Singh's house was chosen to host the meeting with Netaji, as more than 1,000 people could be accommodated. He was also greatly respected in the local Indian community.

As an 18-year old, Namdhari worked hard with his father to ensure that everything went off well when Netaji came to their place. Recalls Namdhari, "Netaji came to the meeting place exactly on time. The crowd went wild on seeing their hero in flesh and blood for the first time. People lifted him on their shoulders and started chanting slogans like Netaji Zindabad and Bharatmata ki jai.

"Many in the crowd started weeping in the wake of his brilliant oratory. They felt helpless sitting thousands of miles away from their motherland.

"Netaji exhorted the Indian community to help so that he could fight the British. He spoke for over 30 minutes and the moment he completed his emotionally charged speech, the expatriate Indian community started giving everything they had with them.

When almost everybody had contributed, he was taken aback that his main host Sardar Pratap Singh didn't contribute anything. He asked his host the reason for not helping the cause of his motherland. Namdhari was present when Netaji asked this question. After a pause, Sardar Pratap Singh said that he was waiting to see how much money was collected. After that he would donate the same amount later. Netaji was overwhelmed with this gesture and embraced his host.

Even after the passage of more than 65 years, Namdhari remembers every word Netaji spoke to his father: "Now, I am convinced that with sons like you, your motherland would be freed sooner than later," Netaji had said.

Namdhari was born in Bangkok. He says that the Thailand's strong Indian community regarded Netaji as no less than God. Even though the generation that saw and greatly admired him is almost negligible, it is a legacy they have left to their successors. Unlike in India, one can still find photos of Netaji in his khakhi dress placed at vantage points in Indian homes.

Santokh Singh Chawla, Namdhari's youngest son, says that even now his father, who is the grand patriarch of the Namdhari Sikh community of India and Thailand, asks his grand and great-grand children to adopt the patriotic ideals of Netaji in their lives.

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