

‘Sultan-ul-Quam’ Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia An Anniversary Tribute

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@ Oct. 20 is the anniversary of the legendary hero.

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BORN WITH BLESSINGS of Guru Gobind Singh, Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia rose to become “Sultan-ul-Quam” (King of the Community) with the blessings of Mata Sundriji who had prophesied that he would be a ruler one day. “Guru ka lal” as he was affectionately referred to, was born on May 3, 1718 AD. Sardar Badar Singh, his father passed away and his wife inculcated in Jassa Singh Ahluwalia valued Sikh ethos as enshrined in the Sikh scriptures. Mata Sundriji was living in Delhi. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and his mother went to Delhi to see Mata Sundriji. They served Mataji so devotedly that she later did not permit them to leave her. The mother-son duo stayed with her for seven years. Mata Sundriji had a special affection for Jassa Singh. For he and his mother used to recite Kirtan mellifluously in the Sikh congregation. During his stay in Delhi, Jassa Singh studied not only religious and historical books but also acquired knowledge of Persian and Hindustani, according to an eminent historian Dr. Ganda Singh.

Sardar Bagh Singh Hollowalia maternal uncle of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, who was incidentally issueless requested Mata Sundriji to permit him to take them. With great hesitancy, she allowed him to take them and they all came to Jalandhar. They met Sr. Kapur Singh, later known as Nawab Kapur Singh, at Kartarpur. Nawab Kapur Singh was deeply impressed by Jassa Singh’s unflinching faith in Sikhism and asked his uncle to leave the boy with him. He ‘baptized’ Jassa Singh and transformed him by getting him trained in horse riding and use of the weapons like sword, spear, bow and arrows under his personal supervision.

The times were bad for the Baba as the order of the shoot-at-sight for Sikhs was in operation. The Sikhs had to live in hiding in scattered groups. They constituted two main groups Budha Dal and Taruna Dal. The former was headed by Nawab Kapur Singh. On October 7, 1753 Nawab Kapur Singh succumbed to an old bullet injury. At the time of his death Nawab Kapur Singh directed Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to serve the Khalsa and thus he became the acknowledged leader of Khalsa of Budha Dal Sect.

Khalsa was gaining upper hand in the battles and so 12 Missals were created to hold the small groups together. Missal Ahluwalia was one of them and Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia became its founder head. After the fall of Lahore in 1759 Sardar Jassa Singh was acclaimed as the supreme leader of the Khalsa Panth, and conferred the title “Sultan-ul-Quam”.

In 1764 Sardar Jassa Singh as head of the combined Khalsa armies marched and conquered Sirhind province, one of the richest in the Empire. A large amount of wealth came into the hands of Singhs’ and a sum of Rs. 9 lakhs was the share of Sardar Jassa Singh who gave all the money for the reconstruction of Sri Darbar Sahib which had earlier been destroyed by Ahmed Shah Abdali. It was during the reign of Maharaj Ranjit Singh that the holy building was gold plated and later came to be known as ‘The Golden Temple’.

In 1783, Sardar Jassa Singh along with Baba Baghel Singh and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia captured Delhi. And on March 11, 1783 he hoisted the Sikh flag on the Red Fort at Delhi.

Besides being a great warrior-hero, Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was a compassionate leader. He was also called "*Bandi Chhor*" (The redeemer) for having rescued 2200 women imprisoned by Ahmed Shah Abdali from his harem. Sardars of all missals occupied large territories and Jassa Singh was contented to have Kapurthala as its territory. Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia accomplished his life mission by ensuring the liberation of Punjab from the Mughals. The picture of the then Punjab from Khyber Pass to Jammu and Sindh to Tibet was the handiwork of Singhs led by Sardar Jassa Singh. In fact, he laid the foundation of the Khalsa Raj which ultimately became a reality with the establishment of the Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was deeply religious. He would visit Sri Darbar Sahib every Diwali and Vaisakhi. On October 20, 17893 AD Sardar Jassa Singh was coming to Amritsar was coming to Amritsar from Fatehabad for Diwali. He halted at a village Bundela and ate a pice of watermelon. He developed stomach ache and while riding his horse on his way to Amritsar, he became unconscious and passed away. According to his will he was cremated in Amritsar near Baba Atal and spot is preserved on the western side of the Parikrama of Baba Atal.

Thus this valiant warrior leader of Punjab who dedicated himself body and soul to the service of the community and his faith and who spent his resources freely and generously in the cause of his country's freedom died after having led a life of action and sacrifice. He left behind a Punjab that could look forward to a great future.

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Sr. Patwant Singh: Death of a devout, stylish and erudite scholar

KHUSHWANT SINGH

A FRIEND RANG ME UP IN THE afternoon to tell me that Patwant Singh had died that morning and his cremation was fixed for later that evening. I switched on my television set to hear what different channels had to say about him. Perhaps they would include tributes from the prime minister, chief minister of Punjab, Sikh leaders and literary personalities. I went from one channel to another. Not one had anything to say about him. I switched off the TV in disgust. Perhaps the morning papers would make up for the omission. Of the six I get, only two paid him tribute. That is the way of the world – no sooner dead that forgotten.

Patwant was a man of substance and had many achievements to his credit. Although almost ten years younger than me, we had many things in common. Our fathers were the builders of New Delhi. Both of us were brought up and educated in Delhi. He tried his hands at building, gave it up and turned to writing on design and architecture. Then he turned to Sikh themes – stories of eminent personalities like Bhagat Puran Singh, biography of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and much else. A sort of sibling rivalry grew between us. The similarity of our names and themes we wrote on added fuel to the rivalry. But neither of us ever criticized the other. He was a devout Sikh; I, a *dheela dhaala* non-believer. Whenever I rang him up, he did not answer with a "hello" as most people do, but with a full blast of the Khalsa greeting "*Sri Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Sri Waheguru ji ki Fateh.*" It made me feel a second-class Sikh.

He was fastidious about his dress and style of living. He was always smartly turned out, with his moustache twirled up. In earlier times, he could be seen walking briskly like a soldier in Lodhi Park. He wore gloves in winter and had a pedigreed dog alongside. People said he was the Hollywood version of a sardar.

He lived in a double storeyed bungalow on Amrita Shergill Marg abutting Lodhi Gardens. His sister, Raseel Basu, lived on the ground floor, he on the upper floor re-designed by himself. He had a cosy study lined with books all around, where he served his guests pre-dinner drinks. There was a large sitting-cum-dining room, with a huge fire-place in the centre covered by an umbrella-like chimney. Guests sat around it and were served with continental-style food by gloved waiters. I have never been at a dinner as classy as Patwant's.

There was a lot more to him than erudition and good living. He built a hospital for poor peasants near the sulphur hot springs at Sohna in Haryana. He spoke about boldly on issues concerning Sikhs. He never forgave Giani Zail Singh for not preventing Operation Bluestar, and for the negative role he and Prime Minister Narasimha Rao played in the massacre of Sikhs in 1984. Nothing daunted him, because he never asked for favours or honours from anyone.

I lost track of Patwant and saw nothing of him for the past 20 years. I heard that late in life he married a Parsi lady friend, Meher Dilshaw, who was devoted to him. Earlier this year, I heard from my friend, Jaya Thadani, who lives part of the year in London, that Patwant and Meher had lunch with her and he looked very ill. Then on Saturday, August 8, 2009 he called it a day. He was 84.

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