



**A SHORT HISTORY OF HIS HOLINESS
SANT BABA SOHAN SINGH JI
OF
MALACCA**

**THE MATERIALS IN THIS BOOKLET
ARE EXTRACTS FROM THE BOOK
"SAFAL JIVAN SANT SOHAN SINGH JI
MALACCA"**

by

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SANT BABA SOHAN SINGH JI'S FAMILY **BACKGROUND**

Sant Baba Sohan Singh Ji was born in 1902 at Phool Nagar. His Father was Punjab Singh and his mother was Prem Kaur. Punjab Singh served in the Military service and was posted to Burma. Consequently, he was promoted to Sergeant. Upon resignation he returned to India and joined the Government Service until he retired.

Punjab Singh had four children - Kishen Kaur, Kharak Singh, Har Kaur, Oodey Singh (The Name which was given to Sant Sohan Singh at birth). When Sohan Singh was seven years old, his village was afflicted by plague. His family had to leave Phool Nagar. They built a new home in the village of Chatheyvaal. It was here that Sohan Singh attended Punjabi school. He was taught gurbani - Panj Granthi, Guru Granth Sahib, Bhagtha di Bani etc. Sohan Singh was trained to become an Akandh Pathi.

Punjab Singh was a herbalist. He used herbs for healing purposes. This knowledge was passed on to Sohan Singh.

SANT HARI SINGH

When Sohan Singh's father passed away, the young Sohan Singh was taken to the village of Jeeon Singh Wala by his eldest sister Kishen Kaur. There was a "Dherra" which

was run by Sant Hari Singh in this village. Sant Hari Singh was a very religious man and he influenced Sohan Singh. As result, the young Sohan Singh became more interested in religious matters, Sohan Singh spent his time doing “sewa” and often discussed matters pertaining to the Sikh religion with Sant Hari Singh. Thus, Sant Hari Singh became Sohan Singh’s religious master. Sant Hari Singh stressed the importance of “amrit”. Hence, Sohan Singh was baptised after going through the “amrit sanchar” (baptism ceremony). Oodey Singh was given the name Sohan Singh after he was baptised as a Khalsa. Sohan Singh was also known to relatives and close friends as “Kaka”.

INTEREST IN ‘KAVESHERI’

Sohan Singh was an expert in kavesheri which is a form of poetry recitation. Sant Hari Singh was instrumental in developing Sohan Singh’s interest in this particulars form of Punjabi Literature. With the dedicated guidance from two teachers, Sardar Bagh Singh and Sardar Mit Singh, the young Sohan Singh developed his talent in kavesheri. Soon, Sohan Singh used kavesheri as a means to convey religious messages to the general public. The beautiful poetry touched the hearts of people and Sohan Singh became well-known for his kavesheri.

INTEREST IN GATKA

Sohan Singh also placed importance on physical well being and a healthy lifestyle. He also felt that Sikhs must be trained in martial arts for self-defence. Thus, he took up 'gatka' which is the traditional Punjab art of self-defence. Although Sohan Singh was an expert in this form self defence, he did not compete in this field.

SOHAN SINGH'S INVOLVEMENT THE RE-FORMATION OF GURDWARAS.

During the British rule in India, Sohan Singh and his companions undertook the difficult task of reforming gurdwaras which were run by dishonest people. The Parbandhak Committees of these gurdwaras did not run the gurdwaras based on true sikh principles. The Akali Dal movement was responsible for "cleansing" the Gurdwaras in India by flushing out bad elements. It was during this time that Sohan Singh was imprisoned along with his companions by the British. In those days, the British rulers in India were very afraid of possible attacks against their Government. There was a law whereby the police were allowed to arrest people who formed any kind of gathering without the permission of the authorities. Sohan Singh was performing kavesheri with his Jatha when he was arrested in Ludhiana. The British police suspected that Sohan Singh and his Jatha were involved in

a protest against the government. However Sohan Singh was bailed out by his brother Kharak Singh.

SOHAN SINGH'S MIGRATION FROM INDIA TO MALAYA

Sohan Singh formed a close relationship with a granthi by the name of Chanan Singh. Both companions shared the same interests. The love for kavesheri brought closer. However, Sohan Singh was separated from his companion when Chanan Singh migrated to Malaya. Upon reaching Malaya, Chanan Singh was appointed the Granthi of the Bentong Sikh Temple. Although the two friends were thousands of miles apart, they kept corresponding with each other. Chanan Singh persuaded Sohan Singh to migrate to Malaya. Thus, Sohan Singh set foot in Malaya in 1923.

Sohan Singh was accompanied by his niece when he first came to Malaya. His niece was married to Natha Singh who was in the police force. Natha Singh was posted to Seremban and lived in the police quarters. It was ruling in those times that only the wife and children of the police officers could stay at the police quarters. Therefore Sohan Singh could not live with his niece. Subsequently, he was given accommodation at the Seremban Sikh Temple. Sohan Singh spent his time doing Sehaj Path and Akandh Path. Since he was well-known for his kavesheri, he was in great demand at religious and social gatherings,

Sohan Singh become more popular as people marvelled at his talent in kavesheri. In Seremban, Sohan Singh formed a close relationship with Datuk Mahima Singh when he was invited to do "path" in the home of latter.

EARLY BEGINNINGS IN MELAKA

On 24 October 1927, Sohan Singh was invited to do kavesheri at a religious function in Melaka. A proposal was made to employ Sohan Singh as granthi at the Melaka Sikh Temple as the position was vacant. According to the gurdwara's book of records, Sohan Singh accepted the post on 8 November 1927. At that time there were two gurdwaras in Melaka. The other gurdwara was the Police Sikh Gurdwara. Sohan Singh was given the responsibility of serving in both gurdwaras. In the morning, the Police Sikh Temple held programmes until 10.00 a.m. After completing his religious duties at this temple, Sohan Singh would then go the Melaka Sikh Temple which held programmes until 2.00 p.m. However, Sohan Singh's duties were not limited to the Melaka Sikh Temple. He was free to carry out religious duties at other gurdwaras situated in the Malay States and Singapore.

During Sohan Singh's stay in Melaka, he continued to pursue religious studies. Since he was interested in Sikh missionary work, Sohan Singh diligently read books on Gurbanti and Sikh history. In addition, he often indulged in religious discussions with other Gianis, namely Giani

Chanan Singh, Giani Gurbax Singh and Giani Gulab Singh of Taiping.

A BRIEF RETURN TO INDIA

Sohan Singh went back to India in November 1932 for two reasons. Firstly Sohan Singh longed to visit his eldest sister who was very old and ailing. Secondly, Sohan Singh wanted to continue his studies. The Melaka Sangat whole-heartedly granted Sohan Singh's request to return to India. There was an understanding between the Melaka Sangat and Sohan Singh that he would continue serving the Melaka Sikh Temple on his return to Malaya. While Sohan Singh was in India, he was pressed by his family to get married. His family sought the help of Sant Hari Singh to persuade Sohan Singh to tie the knot. Sohan Singh held firmly to his conviction to devote his entire life to missionary work. Sohan Singh remained a bachelor all his life.

QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE

Two months after going back to India, Sohan Singh enrolled at the Vidayala Guru Ki Kansi at Damdama Sahib. After one year Sohan Singh emerged the top student and become a Gaini. While studying in the college, Sant Hari Singh provided special tutors to teach Sohan Singh Sanskrit and Hindi.

RETURN TO MALAYA

When Sohan Singh completed his studies, he gained the title "Giant" which means "The Learned One". Consequently he returned to Malaya on 10/06/1934. He continued to serve the Melaka Sangat as promised. Giani Sohan Singh embarked on a new project when he returned to Melaka. He realised the importance of imparting Gurbani to every sikh in the community. His main aim was to train people to read and understand Gurbani.

Gianiji realised that this would only be possible if there was adequate reading material for the Sangat. Gianiji stressed this matter to the Gurdwara committee. The Gurdwara Committee agreed to Gianiji's proposal. Efforts were made to obtain books, magazines and newspapers from India, the Malay states and Singapore. Giani Sohan Singh took personal interest in the setting up of the library. When the task of collecting reading material was completed, the library of the Sikh Temple Melaka was officially opened on 1st, November, 1935.

BHAJAN BHANDAGI

Sant Hari Singh had a great influence in Giani Sohan Singh's life. Sant Hari Singh strongly believed that sikhs should carry out their daily activities during the day and devote time for meditation at night and the early hours of

the morning. He believed that during the “Amrit Vela” one’s mental concentration is free from distraction. Sant Hari Singh was a role model to the young Sohan Singh. Sohan Singh was steadfast in his practice of meditation. He would do ‘Bhajan Bhandagi’ at night. During the day, he spent his time doing Sewa. Giani Sohan Singh’s daily routine was witnessed by Kartar Singh Darji who was a tailor. Kartar Singh stayed at the Gurdwara at night.

Kartar Singh used to watch Giani Sohan Singh deep in meditation. Gianiji was seldom asleep after midnight. He had the habit of walking from the kitchen to the main gate of the Gurdwara. Sometimes he used to sit on the platform in front of the Gurdwara to meditate on Waheguru’s name.

HAK DI KAMAE (TRUTHFUL LIVING)

Giani Sohan Singh was very particular about honest living.

Veer Singh of Singapore had lived in the Gurdwara Sahib Melaka for ten years. Veer Singh used to buy provision and cook for Gianiji. On one occasion, Veer Singh found that there was no ghee left in Gianiji’s provision cupboard. He decided to take one tin of ghee from the Gurdwara provision stores to prepare food for Gianiji. While he was serving the food to Gianiji, Veer Singh related that he had used the ghee from the Gurdwara store.

Upon hearing Veer Singh's story, Gianiji did not touch the food. He immediately gave Veer Singh some money to buy a tin of ghee. Giani Sohan Singh only began eating when Veer Singh had replaced the tin of ghee. This incident clearly illustrates Giani Sohan Singh's firm belief in truthful living.

LEARNING OF ENGLISH

Sardar Joginder Singh Roomi learnt Gurbani and kavesheri from Gianiji. He became a close associate of Gianiji. In return, Joginder Singh taught Gianiji English. Gianiji also had other tutors. Gianiji was able to use English words in his lectures and could understand spoken English.

THE SEATING SYSTEM AT THE GURDWARA

In the earlier days ladies and children used to sit at the back of the Gurdwara. The front portion was occupied by men. On one occasion Giani Sohan Singh Ji was invited to the Kuala Pilah Gurdwara for a programme. He noticed that there was too much noise coming from the back. The ladies had been talking too much. Immediately Gianiji requested the ladies to sit in front. Hence, a new seating system was begun. From then on, the ladies sat on the right and men on the left. Soon, this system was implemented in Gurdwaras all over Malaya.

THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

When the Japanese attacked Malaya, there was massive bombing in most of the towns. Melaka suffered the same fate. Most of the people left the urban areas and went to the rural areas. The sangat tried to persuade Gianiji to move as well, but he refused. Gianiji remarked "Where can one go, leaving Guru Maharaj's House?". He firmly believed that there was no place safer than the House of Waheguru.

Many a time, the Japanese visited the Gurdwara Sahib and saw Gianiji sitting deeply absorbed in prayers. They learnt that Gianiji was a holy man brought no harm to the Gurdwara's property or to those residing within the sacred grounds.

GIANI SOHAN SINGH'S VISIT TO INDIA

While serving the Gurdwara Sahib Melaka, Giani Sohan made visits to India. On some occasions he went back to see his family. However during his subsequent visits to India, his main intention was to gain more material and experience for his missionary work. He also went on a 5 year pilgrimage in the company of holy persons.

SANT BABA SOHAN SINGH JI

When Sohan Singh came to Malaya, his usual attire was a 'kurtha' and a 'Salwar'. However, in 1942 during Guru Nanak Devji's Birthday celebrations, he began wearing a 'gilty'. He used to be dressed in all white.

The gilty was an open chaddar of 9-11 yards which was worn over his shoulder with a long kurtha, with no salwar. When the Sangat saw Giani Sohan Singh dressed in this attire, they began to call him Santji. The significance of the Gilty was Santji's resolve to relieve burden other people's sorrows.

SANT SOHAN SINGH JI'S INVOLVEMENT IN SAMELANS FOR GRANTHIS, (GRANTHI PARCHARAK SAMELANS)

Sant Sohan Singhji was actively involved in samelans which were held specially for Granthis. The first Samelan for Granthis was held in Ipoh in 1954. The second one was held in Kuala Lumpur in 1955. The third Granthi Samelan was held in Seremban and the fourth Granthi Parcharak Samelan was held in Melaka according to the wishes of Santji. This samelan was mainly directed by Santji.

The main objective of the Granthi Parcharak Samelan was to hold discussion on the following:

1. Development of Punjabi Education.
2. The adherence of all granthis to the Rehatnama.
3. To discuss and solve problems faced by the Granthis in the course of their duties.
4. The relationship between the Sangat and the Granthis.

During the Melaka Granthi Parcharak Samelan, the discussions were focused on the need for an organisation to take care of the Sikh Youth. In addition, there was need for special Samelans to impart knowledge on Sikhi to the naujawans. The 1st Naujawan Samelan was held in Port Dickson in 1963. During this Samelan, there was an unanimous decision to establish a special organisation for the naujawans. Hence, the birth of the Sikh Naujawan Sabha Malaysia. Santji was instrumental in the establishment of this organisation.

SANT SOHAN SINGH JI'S DEMISE

In March 1972, Sant Sohan Singh was admitted in the Ipoh Hospital because he was suffering from diabetes. Although he was given modern medicine, he continued to consume herbal preparation which were known to heal diabetes. His condition was critical.

Many Sewaddars attended to Santji's needs day and night. Santji was hospitalised for three months. The Sangat of

Malaysia held Sukhmanti Sahib Path and Akandh Path to pray for Santji's health.

However, doctors had given up hope. Sant Baba Sohan Singh passed away on 24 May 1972. His remains were taken to the Wadda Gurdwara, Ipoh. The Melaka sangat made a request to cremate Santji's body in Melaka and the request was granted.

The cortege left Wadda Gurwara Ipoh on the same day and arrived at the Tat Khalsa Gurdwara in Kuala Lumpur at 4.00 a.m. on 25 May 1972. Then, the cortege stopped at the Gurwara Sahib Seremban and Gurdwara Sahib Tampin. The cortege arrived in Melaka at 11.00 a.m. Then, at 2.00 p.m. on 25 May, 1972 Sant Baba Sohan Singh's body was cremated in Melaka.

After the cremation, a Sehaj Path was started. On 2 June 1972 the Melaka Gurdwara held an Akandh Path and the bhog ceremony was held on 4 June 1972.