

## Bhai Maharaj Singh ji

Bhai Maharaj Singh (d. 1856), a saintly person turned revolutionary who led an anti-British movement in the Punjab after the first Anglo-Sikh war, was born Nihal Singh at the village of Rabbon, in Ludhiana district. He had a religious bent of mind and came under the influence of Bhai Bir Singh of Naurangabad. After the latter's death in 1844, he succeeded him as head of the Naurangabad dera and was held in high esteem by a vast following, including most of the Sikh chiefs and courtiers.

Maharaj Singh's revolutionary career started with the Prema conspiracy case involving him in a plot to murder the British resident, Henry Lawrence, and other pro-British officers of the Lahore Darbar. Maharaj Singh, whose movements were restricted to Naurangabad by the British, went underground. The government confiscated his property at Amritsar and announced a reward for his arrest. Bhai Maharaj Singh intensified his activities against the British when he came to know that Diwan Mul Raj had in April 1848 raised a standard of revolt against them at Multan. He left for Multan with 400 horsemen to join hands with Mul Raj. But soon differences arose between the two leaders, and Maharaj Singh left Multan for Hazara in June 1848 to seek Chatar Singh Atarivala's assistance in his plans to dislodge the British.

In November 1848, he joined Raja Sher Singh's forces at Ramnagar and was seen in the battlefield riding his black mare and exhorting the Sikh soldiers to lay down their lives for the sake of their country. Thereafter he took part in the battles of Chelianvala and Gujrat, but, when Raja Sher Singh surrendered to the British at Rawalpindi on 14 March 1849, he resolved to carry on the fight single-handed. He escaped to Jammu and made Dev Batala his secret headquarters. In December 1849, he went to Hoshiarpur and visited the Sikh regiments to enlist their support. Bhai Maharaj Singh, who carried on his head a price of 10,000 rupees was arrested on 28 December 1849 at Adampur.

"The Guru is no ordinary man," wrote Dr Vansittart, the Jalandhar deputy commissioner, who had arrested him. "He is to the natives what Jesus is to the most zealous of Christians. His miracles were seen by tens of thousands and are more implicitly believed than those worked by the ancient prophets." Vansittart was so greatly impressed by Bhai Maharaj Singh's personality that he recommended special treatment to be accorded him, but the government did not wish to take any risks and deported him to Singapore, along with one of his followers Kharak Singh where, after several years of solitary confinement, he died on 5 July 1856. He had gone blind before the end came.

## Bhai Maharaj Singh

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Bhai Maharaj Singh: Born in village Rabbon, near Malud, Ludhiana Dist. Parents named him Nihal Singh. As a young lad, he went to stay at Bhai Bir Singh's Dera at Naurangabad. Did sewa for many years, took Amrit at the hands of Bhai Bir Singh, was given the name Bhagwan Singh, and eventually became his chela. The Dera was practically a military camp with 1200 musketmen and 3000 horsemen. It had always been a sanctuary for political refugees. It became the centre of the Sikh revolt against Dogra dominance over the Punjab.

Hira Singh Dogra, the chief minister of the Punjab, attacked the Dera in 1844 with 20000 troops and 50 cannon. Several hundred Sikhs, including General Attar Singh Sandhanwalla, Prince Kashmira Singh and Bhai Bir Singh were killed. Bhagwan Singh became the head of the Dera.

The British, who had been waiting for the right moment to intervene and establish their authority, made their move in 1847. They deported Rani Jinda. The Sikh chiefs revolted, including Bhagwan Singh. He was welcomed by Sikhs saying "Ah Wo Maharaj", because of his sanctity, thus, soon he came to be referred to as Bhai Maharaj Singh.

During the second Anglo-Sikh war that followed, at the battles of Ram Nagar, Chillianwall and Gujrat, he was very active providing personal inspiration and organizing supplies for the Sikh Army. Soon after the defeat at Gujrat, all the other Sikh chiefs had been captured or had surrendered.

By the way, Bhai Maharaj Singh was one of the first people of Punjab to launch a freedom movement in Punjab after the British took over Punjab. He said in 1849: "There will be another National War, let all the true Sikhs rise on the day fixed."

"Bhai Maharaj Singh, a Sikh priest of reputed sanctity, and of great influence, the first man who raised the standards of rebellion beyond the confines of Multan in 1848, and the only leader of note who did not lay down his arms to Sir Walter Gilberts at Rawalpindi." - Henry Lawrence, Resident of Lahore

Bhai Maharaj Singh's other name was Bhai Nihal Singh. He belonged to a line of Sikh revolutionaries who wanted to return to the creed of the Gurus. The pinions of this movement were Baba Bhag Singh of Pothohar, his worthy and more popular disciple Bhai Bir Singh of Naurangabad in Amritsar and the latter's successor Bhai Maharaj Singh.

Bhai Maharaj Singh plan of action against the vastly superior British was framed in the jungles of the Chumb Valley.

1. To rescue Maharajah Dalip Singh from Lahore Fort.
2. To organize a United Front of all anti-British forces.
3. Organized disruption by subversion and surprise attacks on British treasuries and cantonments.

He displayed superb military generalship and knowledge of tactical warfare. What sustained him was his rich spiritual heritage.

The British reacted by moving Dalip Singh to securer confinement, encouraged Muslim zealots to locate him for them and offered huge rewards for information of his whereabouts. On the other hand, the British tried to portray him as a religious leader to lower his following as a Military or political leader. It was the British officers who coined the term "Karnivala" since they did not want to admit the failures of their intelligence. Bhai Maharaj Singh, undoubtedly, was certainly a "Miracle Maker" since it became impossible for the British to arrest him. This was due to the support given to him by the public that he was able to hide among the people.

He was captured together with 21 unarmed followers on Dec, 28 1849, near Adampur. Vanstarr, the Deputy Commissioner of Jallundar who arrested him, wrote.

"The Guru is no ordinary man. He is to the natives what Jesus was to the most zealous of Christians. His miracles were seen by tens of thousands, and are more implicitly believed than those worked by the ancient prophets."

Even more generous was Mcleod, Commissioner of the Doab,

".. had he remained at large, but a little longer ... more outrages of an alarming character would have been attempted ... the result of which,.. would perhaps be impossible to foretell."

It was found too risky to put Bhai Maharaj Singh on trial in India and he was deported to Singapore. He arrived on the "Mahomed Shaw", on 9th July 1850, together with a disciple, Khurruck Singh, and moved to Outram Jail. He was kept in solitary confinement in a cell 14 by 15 feet, which, because of the walling up of the windows, had been "further rendered dark, dinghy and absolutely unhealthy" (Secret Consultation Papers, 28th Feb 1851, #52-57). He was practically blind within three years, developed cancer on his tongue, and had rheumatic swellings and pains in his feet and ankles. The Civil Surgeon, Singapore, recommended that Bhai Maharaj Singh be allowed an occasional walk in the open, but this was turned down by the Government of India. The result was that his health continued to deteriorate, and about two months before his death, his neck and tongue became so swollen that it became very difficult for him to swallow.

Bhai Maharaj Singh died on 5th July 1856. He was cremated on a plot of land outside the prison, presumably by Khurruck Singh, who also died in prison later. Locals, mainly Hindu Tamils began to revere the spot, marking it with stones. Offerings of flowers found their way there, Sikhs and Muslims joined in. The Sikhs placed a structure on this spot, turning it into a small temple. In 1966, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib was moved to the Silat Road Temple. Only the stones were re-erected outside the temple. Large numbers of Sikhs and non-Sikhs come to the samadh to worship, with offerings of valuables, a practice against Sikh tenets.

Bhai Maharaj Singh was the head of the Order now known as the Hoti Mardan Valli Sant Khalsa Sampardai, recent illustrious heads were Sant Attar Singh and Sant Isher Singh. He was thus not only a revolutionary fighter but also a recognized religious personage of very high standing. Many believe him to be a "Karniwala". -Source - extracted from 'Bhai Maharaj Singh Saint-Soldier' by Choor Singh, Singapore.

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