

### Bhagat Pūran Singh (1904 -1992)

Bhagat Pūran Singh serves as one of the greatest Sikh heroes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He worked entirely selflessly throughout his life to provide hope to mentally and terminally ill patients. Whenever he saw a deserted dead body, he would immediately hand-prepare a grave and give the human/animal a respectable burial. He was to Sikhism what Mother Teresa is to Catholicism. Against the backdrop of violence and poverty in 1947 he established a premier institute, Pingalvārā (ਪਿੰਗਲਵਾਰਾ), which takes care of sick, disabled and forlorn persons.

Whatever money and financial resources he could gather, he used to establish this institute. He was nomination candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990 for his grit, determination, faith in the almighty and unending love for the suffering humanity. A very brief sketch of Bhagat Pūran Singh's life is given below

Bhagat Pūran Singh was born at Rajevāl, District. Ludhiānā on June 4, 1904 at the house of Chaudhari Chibu Mal and Mahtāb Kaur. In an interview with Patvant Singh Bhagat Pūran Singh discloses how he became a Sikh. In his early life, he traveled from village to village and would stay at local Hindu Temples. One day when he was staying at a Temple, Brahmins told him to clean the temple. When he finished, they sat in front of him and ate without offering him any food. However, the next time he stayed at a Gurduārā, a Sikh individual not only gave him good food but also a cot and a glass of milk afterwards, without asking for anything in return. This began his close relationship with the Sikh tradition.

He set out in life for the service of the suffering humanity and founded Pingalvārā in 1947 with a few discarded patients. He was also a writer as well as publisher and an environmentalist. Bhagat Pūran Singh's contribution in spreading awareness about the global dangers of pollution, increasing soil erosion, etc. are also commendable. His dedication was awarded with heaps of honors by many quarters. Prestigious among these was the Padamshri award in 1979, which he surrendered in the wake of the army attack on the Golden Temple in 1984. He passed away on August 5, 1992.

Here are some of the quotes of Bhagat Pūran Singh

*“Dignity in death is a birthright of each living thing”.*

*“All Punjabis should at least sow a tree of ‘Bohar’, ‘Pippal’ and ‘Neem’. These trees are essential to our eco system.”*

<http://allaboutsikhs.com/person/bhaipuransingh.htm>



<http://www.sikhpoint.com/religion/sikhcommunity/puransingh.htm>

*Teacher should read this to the children to highlight his love for all of creation.*

### My Mother

By Bhagat Puran Singh

While studying in Khanna once I went to meet my mother in Lahore. At this time she was working in Sir Ganga Ram Hospital. When I reached there my mother had only one thought that she should take me to pay obeisance at the Shiv Mandir of the locality and Gurudwara Dera Sahib.

At this time I was a Hindu boy named Ramjidas. I was a follower of Shiv Mandir and was not a Sikh. In the Shiv Mandir I saw no personal service being done. There was no devotional singing in praise of deity, no place for the travelers to stay, no free kitchen, and hardly anyone came to pay obeisance. There was a priest sitting quietly in a small house. No religious book was being read.

Gurdwara Dera Sahib is one of the most important pilgrimage center of the Sikhs. When I reached Gurdwara Dera Sahib I was surprised to see the gaiety and environment of that place. In the early morning Asa Di War was recited and in the evening Rehras. Every morning and evening many people would come to listen to the Words of the Gurus. This Gurdwara is situated on the G T Road running from Peshawar to Calcutta.

Devotees kept coming throughout the day. Many travelers would also come to take food from the common kitchen or to pay obeisance at the Gurdwara. The common kitchen opened at about 10 or 11 o'clock and remained open at night also. Every night 25-30 travelers would

come to the Gurdwara to stay; they were all served food from the common kitchen. This culture of the Gurdwaras deeply affected me.

From my childhood, my mother had asked me to do personal service to all the creations of God. This tender and distinct feeling of virtuous tasks was ingrained in my mind. My mother had taught me to provide water to the animals, plant trees and water newly planted saplings, offer feed to the Sparrows, Crows and Mynahs, pick up thorns from the paths, and remove the stones from cart tracks. This had embedded the Name of the Almighty in my heart. She had entrusted me to the custody of Gurdwara Dera Sahib and started me on a path of virtuous living. By following this path your mind can never waver.

For five years she did not spend anything on herself. She would send her entire monthly earning of rupees-- 10 to me. The servants in the house have to sometimes eat stale or left-over Chapattis, my mother used to eat whatever was given to her. She also used to get old and used clothes from the house she was working in, so she would save the entire amount of ten rupees and send them to me by Money Order.

While at home in the month of Kartrik my mother used to get up early in the morning and go for a bath at the village pond. This pond was constructed by my father. Thereafter, she would recite Japji Sahib, churn the curds, then prepare the breakfast. Throughout the day she would sit at her spinning wheel or gin the cotton seeds.

A mother, who would draw water from the village well throughout the day during summer months for the travelers and the animals; never sit idle; always keep the Name of the Almighty in her heart; recite Japji Sahib in the morning; had to put in my heart fear and respect for God. God has really blessed me that till today I have been able to keep my vow taken before my mother of remaining a bachelor with full purity of heart. If I were not to fulfill my vow it would have been a matter of great dishonour for my life. Curse of God would have remained over me always. I am thankful to God that the vow taken before my mother is always in my mind and keeps me alert. It keeps me engrossed in His name throughout the day. It keeps reminding me some of the most of the virtuous Sikhs like; Akali Kaur Singh Nihang, Sant Kishan Singh, Sant Attar Singh Mastooana; Sant Harbhajan Singh Rajof Bani Amrit Parchar Sangat. It keeps me busy in various tasks of service and devotion and urges me to pray Oh God! Keep alive my Cripple who has a mind like that of a child. His childlike antics keep me happy. His antics and my care for him keeps me in contact with God and makes me pray that I should continue to look after the Cripple, keep him healthy and happy. Watching his antics also helps me in leading a happy and contented life. To do all this I should keep my life pious and virtuous and should not allow even a single evil thought to enter my mind.

### Bhāī Ghannīā (ਭਾਈ ਘਨਈਆ)

Bhāī Ghannīā was founder of the Sevāpanthīs (ਸੇਵਾਪੰਥੀ). He was born in Sodhārā near Wazirābād in Siālkot District (now in Pakistan). His father was a wealthy trader, but he himself being of a religious bent of mind left home when still very young and roamed about with searching for spiritual peace.

His quest ended as he met Gurū Teghbahādur in 1621 and accepted initiation at his hands. Bhāī Ghannīā established a dharamsāl at Kāvḥā village in the present Attock district of Pakistan. His special mission was selfless service of humanity with no distinction of nationality, caste or creed. In 1705, he was on a visit to Anandpur when Anandpur was invested by a combination of hill troops and the Mughal imperial army.

It is this anecdote which he is most well-known for. During the frequent sallies and skirmishes, Bhāī Ghannīā used to roam around serving water to the wounded and the dying without distinction of friend and foe. Some Sikhs complained to Gurū Gobind Singh that Bhāī Ghannīā had been resuscitating the fallen enemy soldiers. As Gurū Gobind Singh summoned Bhāī Ghannīā and told him what the Sikhs had said.

Bhāī Ghannīā responded, “Yes sir, what they said is true in a sense. But I saw no Mughals or Sikhs in the battlefield. I only saw the Gurū's face in everyone.” The Gurū, pleased with the reply, blessed him and told his Sikhs that Bhāī Ghannīā had understood his teaching correctly. Gurū also gave him medicine to be put on the wounds of fallen soldiers (Sikhs and non-Sikhs). After evacuation of Anandpur, Bhāī Ghannīā retired to Sodhārā where he passed away in 1718.

*Adapted from Encyclopedia of Sikhism, by Harbans Singh, published by Panjabi University, Patiala.*