

Bhai Jaita and the Journey of Guru Tegh Bahadur's Sis from Delhi to Anandpur Sahib

We have all heard the story of how Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib traveled from Anandpur Sahib to Delhi to sacrifice his life for freedom of religion and the right of Hindus to practice their faith. However, the aftermath of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's Shahidi and how Bhai Jaita took Guru Sahib's sees (head) back to Anandpur Sahib is not well known. It is an amazing story that is worth sharing.

Early Life

Bhai Jaita jee, later known as Bhai Jeevan Singh, was born in 1649 to a Sikh family once of the scavenger caste. Bhai Jaita and his brother Bhag Chand were Sikhs of Guru Har Rai Sahib. They began to live in Ramdas with Bhai Gurditta jee a very respected Gursikh who was a descendant of Baba Buddha jee. Bhai Gurditta jee was with Guru Harkrishan at the time of Guru jee's leaving this world and was later the one who performed the Guruship ceremony of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Before Guru Tegh Bahadur left for Delhi, he was called once again to perform the ceremony for Guru Gobind Rai jee.

After Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib set out to court arrest, Bhai Gurditta jee also left for Delhi. Bhai Jaita followed him. At Delhi, Bhai Gurditta jee saw the brutal martyrdoms of the three Sikhs, one after another. So did Bhai Jaita. The day of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's martyrdom was now approaching. Bhai Jaita and Bhai Gurditta did not sleep the entire night. They prepared themselves for the sight they were about to see. Their beloved Satguru would be beheaded before them but they could not let their tears escape or utter any cry. They would have to be silent lest they be discovered and not be able to perform seva of Guru Sahib's body. They did Ardaas to Guru Tegh Bahadur that they be able to bear the sight of the horror that was to come and not utter a sound.

Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's Shahidi

The morning of November 11 1675 dawned. Guru Tegh Bahadur's small cage was brought to Chandani Chownk. There was a large tree that stood in the middle of the Chownk. The Chownk was a terrifying place this day. There were still the marks of the horrific tortures and Shahidis of Bhai Mati Das, Bhai Sati Das and Bhai Dayala. Amongst the crowd assembled to see the execution was Bhai Jaita, hiding himself so no one could recognize that a Sikh of the Guru was present.

It was mid-day now. There stood the Kazi, Abdul Wahabb and the executioner, Jalaludin. Jalaludin came forward and opened Guru Tegh Bahadur's cage. Satguru jee stepped out. The Kazi said to Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, "There is still time. Embrace Islam and you will be saved. Or you may show us a miracle and you will be rewarded with a great position. If neither of these are acceptable to you then you may choose death."

Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib replied, "I want that which my Sikhs wanted. If my Sikhs did not falter then can you expect anything different from me?"

Guru Tegh Bahadur was asked his final wish. Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib replied that he should be allowed to do ishnaan. Guru Tegh Bahadur was allowed to bathe with water from a nearby well. He dressed in fresh clothes and sat under the large tree at the centre of the Chownk. Satguru jee closed his eyes and began to recite Sri Japji Sahib in a loud voice. Clouds began to form and it began to grow darker. The sky had a reddish glow now. As Guru Sahib recited Japji Sahib in his sweet voice, with every word, the Sikhs in the crowd realized the moment of his Shahidi was drawing closer. Satguru jee recited the final Salok and bowed his head before Akaal Purakh. There was an instant of silence and then Jalaludin, with both his hands clenching the sharp sword, swung and severed Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's head from his body.

Streams of blood flowed on to the ground and the sky too was now blood red. A ferocious wind began to blow and the storm broke. As the heavy rain fell, the crowd dispersed.

The Sikhs Gather

The Sikhs who witnessed the Shahidi of Guru Tegh Bahadur gathered at house of Bhai Nainoo. Their grief knew no end. Bhai Tulsi insisted that they could not allow Satguru Tegh Bahadur's body to simply lie in Chandani Chownk. They decided to ask Bhai Lakhi Das, a powerful trader for help. They went to Bhai Lakhi Das's home where he had just returned from a trip to Narnaul to get lime and sand. The caravan carrying the goods Bhai Lakhi Das had purchased was to arrive in Delhi that night and the Sikhs decided that they would hide in this caravan and take the bodies of the Sikhs and Guru jee from the Chownk.

Taking Guru Sahib's Body

It was now well into the night and the storm over Delhi was still raging. Bhai Nainoo, Bhai Ageya, Bhai Jaita and Bhai Udda traveled with the caravan carrying Bhai Lakhi Das's goods. They passed by the Red Fort and then the Kotwali and finally reached Chandani Chownk. Bhai Jaita jee, using the darkness and the cover of the storm, lifted up Guru Tegh Bahadur jee's head and covered it with a white scarf.

Bhai Lakhi Das and his son Bhai Nagahiya were following in the caravan and as it slowly passed through the Chownk, they took the body of Guru Tegh Bahadur and placed it in a cart and kept moving. Bhai Lakhi Das thought the most inconspicuous way to cremate Guru Sahib's body would be to place it within his home and light the entire home on fire so no one would suspect what really was happening. This is what he did. As he and the other Sikhs stood outside, the flames from Bhai Lakhi Das's home leapt into the sky and Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's body was cremated.

The next day, Bhai Gurditta jee also left this world, following his master Guru Tegh Bahadur. He was cremated by the banks of the Jamuna. Bhai Lakhi Das remained in Delhi for some days and managed through the help of the town crier to take away the bodies of the Shahid Sikhs and cremate them at the same place Bhai Gurditta was cremated.

Bhai Jaita meanwhile was escaping with Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's head. He decided that Guru Gobind Rai and the Sikhs would be waiting to have the final darshand and so he began to

make his way towards Anandpur Sahib. Bhai Jaita clenched Satguru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's head to his chest and did an Ardaas that he be blessed with the strength to return to Anandpur Sahib. The Mughals would be searching for the head and so he could not travel on the common roads. He would have to travel through the forests and jungles so he would not be detected.

The First Night

Bhai Jaita left Delhi and in his first night, covered 40 kilometers. He arrived in the town of Baghpat.

The morning of November 12th was beginning to dawn and Bhai Jaita arrived near the Dargah of a Sufi saint, Sheikh Wahuddin. Wahuddin asked "Who are you?" Bhai Jaita declared, "I am a Sikh of Guru Tegh Bahadur." Wahuddin asked, "Where is your Guru now?" Bhai Jaita with tears in his eyes told the Sufi of Guru Sahib's martyrdom and revealed that he was carrying Guru Sahib's head back to Anandpur Sahib. Wahuddin was an admirer of Guru Tegh Bahadur and said he would help Bhai Jaita. He led Bhai Sahib to the house of Bhai Krishan Pal. Bhai Jaita had been running without stop all night and finally rested at Bhai Krishan Pal's home.

Bhai Jaita jee tenderly uncovered Guru Sahib's head and saw that the cloth was covered in blood and so he took a fresh cloth and covered the head once again.

The Second Day: Meeting a Devoted Sikh

After a brief rest, Bhai Jaita left Baghpat and ran all day, arriving by nightfall at Taravari. Bhai Jaita was exhausted and wanted to rest for a few hours so he could once again set out at amrit vela. There was a large fort in the town and beside it a pond. The people would come there to wash their clothes and on side of the pond was a dense forest. Bhai Jaita decided to rest in the forest. As he trudged through the trees, a washerman who was still at pond and called out, "Who's there?!" Bhai Jaita heard the voice and something in him said that this voice sounded like that of a Sikh. He did not know why, but he trusted it. Bhai Jaita replied, "I am a Sikh of Guru Tegh Bahadur". The washerman exclaimed, "You are a Sikh and this town too has the home of a Sikh so why should you spend the night lying in the forest? Come with me beloved Sikh of the Satguru! I am a poor man with very little, but whatever I have you are welcome to share."

Bhai Jaita stepped out from the trees, clutching Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's head to his chest and began to walk with the washerman who introduced himself as Bhai Deva Ram. Bhai Deva Ram had picked up the clothes he had been washing and asked, "Is there any news of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib?"

Bhai Jaita jee heard the question and kept walking silently. Bhai Deva Ram and Bhai Jaita arrived home and once again Bhai Deva Ram asked, "What news is there of Satguru jee?" It was dark now and Bhai Deva Ram lit some candles and asked his wife to prepare some food. He saw the bundle in Bhai Jaita's arms and asked, "What is in your bundle?" Bhai Jaita replied, "It is my treasure that I would not trade even for my life." Bhai Deva Ram offered, "give your bundle to us and rest. We shall take care of it till morning..." Bhai Jaita remained silent.

Bhai Deva Ram saw the silence and decided to ask Bhai Jaita something else. He said, “When you meet Guru Tegh Bahadur please tell him that his poor Sikh, Deva Ram has sewn some clothing for him. May he bless us by stopping here some time to accept our offering.”

It was as if even after leaving his body, that Guru Tegh Bahadur was accepting the ardaas of his Sikhs.

Bhai Jaita took the candle from Bhai Deva Ram and layer by layer began to uncover his bundle. The final fold had some blood on it and when he pulled it back, Bhai Deva Ram’s eyes fell on Guru Tegh Bahadur jee’s head. Bhai Jaita could not speak and sat to one side on the ground as Guru Sahib’s head rested on the bed.

Bhai Deva Ram began to weep and thought that he had asked for Guru Sahib’s darshan but who knew it would come in this form?

Bhai Jaita could eat very little. He told Bhai Deva Ram all that had happened. Bhai Deva Ram asked Bhai Jaita to rest and said he would do the seva of Guru Sahib’s head. Bhai Deva Ram lovingly covered Guru Sahib’s head in the new scarf he had prepared for Guru Sahib and was going to offer. He took the rest of the clothes he had sewn and began to whisk them over Guru Sahib’s head as a chaur. All night, Bhai Deva Ram did chaur of Guru Sahib’s head and did not sleep for even an instant.

Third Day

At amrit vela, Bhai Jaita did ishnaan and then took up Guru Sahib’s head. He saw that Bhai Deva Ram had covered it in the scarf he had said he wanted to offer. Tears formed in Bhai Sahib’s eyes and he thought, “Guru Sahib, even now you take me where your Sikhs wait for your darshan...”

It was now November 13th. Traveling through the jungles over rocks and thorns, Bhai Jaita arrived at sunset near the town of Ambala. There was a river flowing there and Bhai Jaita rested under a tree. Bhai Jaita asked a passerby if there was the home of a Sikh anywhere. He was told to go to nearby Kainth Majri.

At Kainth Majri, Bhai Jaita met Bhai Ramdev. He told Bhai Ramdev that he was a Sikh and asked if he might rest somewhere. Bhai Ramdev took Bhai Jaita to his home. Once there, he asked Bhai Jaita what was in the bundle he was carrying. Once again, in the candlelight, Bhai Jaita uncovered Guru Sahib’s head and Bhai Ramdev too fell to the ground. While Guru Sahib’s head rested on the bed, Bhai Jaita and Bhai Ramdev remained the entire night on the ground.

Fourth Day: Meeting a Fakir

The next day, Bhai Jaita arrived at Nabha Sahib. Bhai Jaita hid in the bushes to rest but was noticed by a fakir, Dargahi Shah. Dargahi Shah asked Bhai Jaita who he was and Bhai Jaita

replied, “A Sikh of Guru Tegh Bahadur”. Dargahi Shah replied, “You are a Sikh and so why do you stay here? Come with me to my hut.”

Dargahi Shah who was a devotee of the Gurus, took Bhai Jaita to his home and there said to Bhai jee, “Oh Sikh, when you see Guru Tegh Bahadur be sure to tell him that this old man would like to have his darshan once before he dies.”

For the fourth time in his journey, Bhai Jaita uncovered Guru Sahib’s head and said, “Baba, if you truly want Guru Sahib’s darshan, then behold his divine head.” The Fakir fell back and asked what had happened. Bhai Jaita told him of the Shahidi of Guru Tegh Bahadur.

All night, Dargahi Shah stayed awake and gazed at Guru jee’s head. At amrit vela, as Bhai Jaita asked to leave, Dargahi Shah took Guru Sahib’s head in his arms and as he would normally see off his respected guest, began to walk with Bhai Jaita. After some distance, he gently handed the head back to Bhai Jaita and said, “Tell Guru Gobind Rai that this old fakir will only leave his body after having his darshan.” Some years later, after the battle of Bhangani, Guru Gobind Singh and Bhai Jaita returned to meet this old fakir and only then did Dargahi Shah leave this world.

Fifth Day: Reaching Kiratpur Sahib

On November 14th, Bhai Jaita finally saw Kiratpur Sahib ahead of him. Kiratpur Sahib is not very far from Anandpur Sahib and is the holy place where Guru Hargobind Sahib and Guru Har Rai Sahib were cremated. Bhai Jaita wondered whether Guru Gobind Rai would want Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib’s head to be cremated here as well. Bhai Jaita rested where today stands Gurdwara Bibangarh Sahib.

Bhai Jaita had now been meet by other Sikhs and they sent a message to Guru Gobind Rai that his father’s head had arrived at Kiratpur Sahib. As the sun set on November 14th, the message arrived at Anandpur Sahib.

The Sikh carrying the message entered Guru Sahib’s home and Mata Nanaki asked, “what is the news?” The Sikh could not speak. When Guru Gobind Rai appeared, the Sikh fell at his feet and told them that Bhai Jaita had brought Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib’s head. Upon hearing the news, Guru Gobind Rai, Mata Nanaki jee, Mata Gujri jee, and the rest of the Sikh Sangat left Anandpur Sahib and took with them a palki (palanquin).

Ranghreta Guru Ka Beta

The Sangat arrived at Kiratpur Sahib, singing Gurbani. Bhai Jaita was still holding Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib’s head. He saw Guru Gobind Rai and placed the bundle before him and stepped back his eyes cast downwards. Guru Gobind Rai first uncovered Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib’s head and had its darshan. He then took Mata Nanaki jee by the arm and said, “Grandmother, come and see your son’s head.” Mata jee tenderly kissed Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib’s forehead, smiled and said, “look, the glow on my beloved one’s face is the same as it always was.”

Mata Gujri jee stepped forward, bowed and said, “Lord, you love (for the Divine) endured. May mine endure as well.”

Guru Gobind Rai jee called Bhai Jaita. Bhai Jaita, who had traveled for so many days, his body tired and battered by the long and treacherous journey, stepped forward. Guru Gobind Rai took Bhai Jaita in his arms and said “Ranghreta, Guru ka Beta”. Meaning, “Ranghreta (one from the Ranghar tribe) is the Guru’s own son.” Bhai Jaita replied, “Satguru, give me the gift of Sikhi, bless me that I may remain yours. I only ask that the day I die, may I have your blessings.”

Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib’s head was placed in the palki and carried by the Sangat to Anandpur Sahib where Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib stands today. Rosewater was brought and Guru Gobind Rai washed Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib’s head and asked Bhai Jaita to also join him. They then made the pyre of sandalwood and Guru Gobind Rai gave it the flame.

After the Saskaar

Guru Gobind Rai asked Bhai Jaita to tell him what he had seen and how Guru Tegh Bahadur had embraced martyrdom. After hearing the story, Guru Gobind Rai asked how many Sikhs were in the crowd that saw the martyrdom. Bhai Jaita replied that he did not know as it was hard to recognize them. Guru Gobind Rai declared that he would create such an image for Sikhs that they could be spotted in a crowd of thousands.

At the place of Damadama Sahib at Anandpur Sahib, Guru Gobind Rai arranged for the recitation of Guru Granth Sahib jee and Bhai Chaupat Rai (later Bhai Chaupa Singh) lovingly recited the saloks of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib. Food and clothing were then distributed to the poor.

Bhai Jaita to Bhai Jeevan Singh

Bhai Jaita jee began to live at Anandpur Sahib now. In 1691 he married Bibi Raj Kaur and they had four sons. When Guru Gobind Rai established the Ranjit Nagara, Bhai Jaita jee was the first one given the duty to play it. Bhai Jaita became known as a great warrior and trained other Gursikhs as well.

In 1699 when Guru Gobind Singh gave Khande ki Pahul, Bhai Jaita jee became Bhai Jeevan Singh.

Shahidi of Bhai Jeevan Singh

When Guru Gobind Singh and the Sikhs evacuated Anandpur Sahib, Bhai Jeevan Singh too accompanied Guru Sahib. Bhai Sahib’s old mother Mata Prem Kaur was lost in the Sirsa. When Baba Ajeet Singh jee was surrounded by the Mughal army at the banks of the Sirsa, Bhai Jeevan Singh charged forward, his horse’s reins in his mouth and a sword in each hand. With the kirpans in both hands, he cut through the encirclement and made a path for Baba Ajeet Singh to exit.

The Bhatt Vehis say that Bhai Jeevan Singh kept traveling with Guru Sahib's caravan until Kotla Nihang Khan. Here, Bhai Jeevan Singh shot arrow after arrow and wreaked havoc on the Mughals. Finally, a bullet hit Bhai Sahib in the forehead and after bellowing "Sat Sri Akaal!" he fell to the ground and left his body, a beloved Sikh of the Guru till the end.

Aftermath & History

In 1783 Sardar Baghel Singh and the Sikh army conquered Delhi. The Nishan Sahib flew high over the Red Fort. Sardar Bagehl Singh had one desire, that the places associated with Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's be commemorated.

He had an announcement made by the beat of a drum that if anyone knew where the exact place of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's martyrdom was, they should come to him. The old grand daughter of a water carrier came forward. She told Sardar Baghel Singh that when Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib was beheaded, her grandfather was called to wash the place. She said that she was a little girl but she had seen the martyrdom of the Sikhs and Guru Sahib. They took her to Chandani Chowk and though she was almost blind and walked very slowly, she walked to the spot where Guru Sahib was martyred and said that Guru Sahib's blood had spilled at this place. Sardar Baghel Singh thanked her profusely and gave her family countless gifts. This is the place that Gurdwara Sis Ganj was established and even today can be seen.

In total, with help of old Hindu, Muslim and Sikh residents of Delhi, Sardar Baghel Singh found and established Gurdwaras at seven historical places:

1. Gurdwara Mata Sundri Ji at the place which was know as the Haveli Sardar Jawahar Singh.
2. Gurdwara Bangla Sahib. A Mansion belonging to Raja Jai Singh existed there once. Guru Harkrishan Dev, the Eighth Guru had stayed there.
3. Gurdwara Bala Sahib. Last rights of Guru Harkrishan, Mata Sundri and Mata Sahib Kaur were performed at this place.
4. Gurdwara Rakab Ganj. The torso of Guru Tegh Bahadur was cremated here.
5. Gurdwara Sees Ganj. Guru Tegh Bahadur was martyred at this place.
6. Gurdwara Moti Bagh. Guru Gobind Singh sent a message to the Mughal King, Bahadur Shah, by shooting an arrow from this place.
7. Gurdwara Majnu Tilla. It was established in the memory of a Sikh of Guru Nanak, named Majnu. Guru Hargobind stayed at this place on his way to Gwalior.

Here lie the Guru's ashes

K.S. Bains on Gurdwara Rakab Ganj, which stands where Guru Teg Bahadur was cremated. This is the sixth of the nine-part series on important Sikh shrines in Delhi

THE place where Gurdwara Rakab Ganj is located was initially a storehouse of rakabs (stirrups) for the Mughal cavalry. Around it was a small locality where a cotton trader named Lakhi Shah lived.

Lakhi was present at the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur with some carts loaded with cotton. It is said that immediately after the beheading of the Guru Teg Bahadur, there was a violent storm. In the confusion that followed, Lakhi hid the body of the Guru in his cart. According to another version, the Guru's body lay unguarded in a dungeon and Lakhi managed to get the body to his house. In order to save the Guru's body from being dishonoured, he cremated the body by setting on fire his thatched house. The next morning, he collected the ashes in a copper urn, which he buried where the Guru's body had laid. Another follower of the Guru, Bhai Jeta, had carried the head of the slain Guru to Anandpur Sahib.



Gurdwara Rakab Ganj is in the heart of the Capitol Complex

In course of time, a mosque came up at the spot where the Guru's body was cremated. In the late 18th century when Baghel Singh, head of the Karorsinghia misl, learnt about the copper urn, he pleaded with Muslim leaders that the place be dug up. On digging, the sacred urn was found and Baghel Singh built a gurdwara there. He also attached a jagir to the gurdwara for its maintenance.

After the First War of Independence in 1857, Gurdwara Rakab Ganj was replaced by a mosque. The matter was taken up by Sikhs in the High Court. Their case was rejected by the court and was taken to the Privy Council, which ruled in favour of the gurdwara. The gurdwara was again built along with a boundary wall.

Since the gurdwara was in an impressive location, with striking buildings like those of Parliament, Central Secretariat and Rashtrapati Bhawan near it, it was decided to reconstruct the gurdwara in the 1960s.

One Harnam Singh Suri, a dry fruit dealer from Iran, offered to mobilise Rs 30 lakh and build the gurdwara. His request was accepted, and thus came up the present Gurdwara Rakab Ganj.

Built on a 10-foot-high pedestal, the gurdwara has a wide *parikrama* on all four sides. In the four corners of the *parikrama*, are four *chabutras*. The gurdwara has three receding storeys. The height of the first storey itself is more than three storeys of a normal building. The gurdwara, with a *chajja* around it, sports the same fa`E7ade on all four sides. Its high gate displays two parts: the lower part constitutes of the entrance *darwaza* and the upper part comprises a protruding balcony with a typical dome on a rectangular base.

There are four domes in the four corners of the first floor. The second storey is about half the height of the first one. Again, there are four domes in the four corners. These domes are much smaller than those on the first floor. The central dome, in the middle of an arcaded square on the roof of the second floor, is surrounded by smaller domes. The

various sizes of the domes at different levels present an artistic picture. All the domes are ribbed with inverted lotus leaves on the top.

The gurdwara displays delicate jaliwork in marble, which is somewhat similar to the work done on the tomb of Salim Chisti in Fatehpur Sikri. The side pillars bear elements of Persian architecture. Inside the gurdwara is the spot where the actual cremation of Guru Teg Bahadur took place.

The main entrance to the gurdwara is on the side facing the Parliament building, but the entrance that is commonly used is the one near the parking area. There is an impressive flight of steps with marble colonnade on both sides.

Bhai Harbans Singh, who has devoted his entire life to the construction of gurdwaras in Delhi and Punjab, approached the organising committee of the IX Asian Games in 1981-82, of which Buta Singh was chairman, to help him design a big congregation hall in the gurdwara complex. The location of the hall suggested, however, did not fit with the overall design of the structure.

Thus came up the Lakhi Shah hall in Rakab Ganj Gurdwara. Both architecturally as well as in terms of the material used, the hall doesn't jell with the main Gurdwara building. The hall is mostly used for celebrating Gurburb or conducting kirtan and marriage ceremonies.

The office of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee on the gurdwara premises also does not conform to the architectural ambience of the rest of the building. It squarely faces the approach to the gurdwara and spoils the overall character of the place. For, as you enter the gurdwara, on your left side is a beautiful marble structure that holds great religious sanctity, while on the right side is the office with its regular stream of visitors. The contrast between the two sides is rather stark and avoidable. A langar building is also coming up.

According to Sikh *parampara*, gurdwaras once constructed can be improved upon or re-constructed. All Sikh shrines, including the Golden Temple, have undergone restoration and even construction at some point or the other. There is still time to redesign some of the buildings and make them architectural wonders.