

Bhāi Manī Singh

In 1699 when Gobind Rāi (ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਰਾਇ) became Gobind Singh and initiated the Amrit ceremony, Manī Singh joined the Khālsā. In 1704 Manī Singh was with the Gurū when he was forced to evacuate Anandpur. Manī Singh went to Damdamā Sāhib with the Gurū and wrote a copy of the Gurū Granth Sāhib. After Gurū Sāhib passed away, Bhāi Manī Singh was made Granthī of Darbār Sāhib. He was well respected and admired by all.

During this time, the Muslim rulers had given orders to massacre the Sikhs. They made an extra effort to make sure that Sikhs could not congregate in large numbers. For this reason, the Divālī festival had not been held in Amritsar. In the year 1738, Manī Singh decided to ask for permission from the governor of Lahore to hold the festival. The permission was granted on the condition that Bhāi Manī Singh would pay the government Rs. 5,000 after the festival. Manī Singh had believed that he would be able to pay this amount from the offerings made by the Sikhs. He sent out the invitation to Sikhs all over Pañjāb. Everyone was excited to attend the festival – many Sikhs began to leave for the journey to Amritsar shortly after they learned about the Divālī festival.

Bhāi Manī Singh had not known of the governor's true intentions earlier. According to him, he was sending a force of some officers to keep order during the festival but Manī Singh knew that something did not seem right. The large force sent by the governor was under the command of Divān Lakhpat Rāi (ਦਿਵਾਨ ਲਖਪਤ ਰਾਇ) who hated the Sikhs and was a sworn enemy of them. The force wasn't sent to keep order, instead it was sent to keep the Sikhs away from Amritsar. Lakhpat Rāi and the governor were afraid of allowing too many Sikhs to congregate. They had decided to have the force march into the city on the day of the festival so that the Sikhs would become afraid and leave on their own. Bhāi Manī Singh destroyed their plan by sending out another letter telling Sikhs not to come to Amritsar.

Since no festival was held, Bhāi Manī Singh refused to make the payment. This was also an assertion of sovereignty. He was arrested for failing to make the payment. He was taken prisoner to Lahore in chains. There, he was brutally tortured. He was given the opportunity to save himself all he had to do was convert to Islam. Bhāi Sāhib remained calm and refused to convert to Islam. Orders were issued that his body should be cut to pieces, limb by limb. As the executioner was about to begin, Bhāi Sāhib sat serenely. His focus was on Vāhigurū. Bhāi Manī Singh attained martyrdom about one month after the day on which Divālī festival was to have been held in 1738.

Bandi Choṛ Divas (ਬੰਦੀ ਛੋੜ ਦਿਵਸ)

Bandī Choṛ is also a very special time for the Sikhs because we celebrate the return of Gurū Hargobind from his imprisonment in Gvāliar (ਗਵਾਲਿਅਰ) Fort. He refused to be released until the other 52 kings were also released who were being held there unfairly. It was decided that those that could hold on to Gurū Sāhib's robe could be released along with him. A special chola was made with 52 strips. All the kings were able to hold on to Gurū Hargobind's robe and were released. His return to Amritsar was celebrated with lights illuminating the city of Amritsar. This was close to the same time as Divālī (ਦਿਵਾਲੀ) – however, the city was not celebrating Divālī, they were celebrating the return of our Gurū.