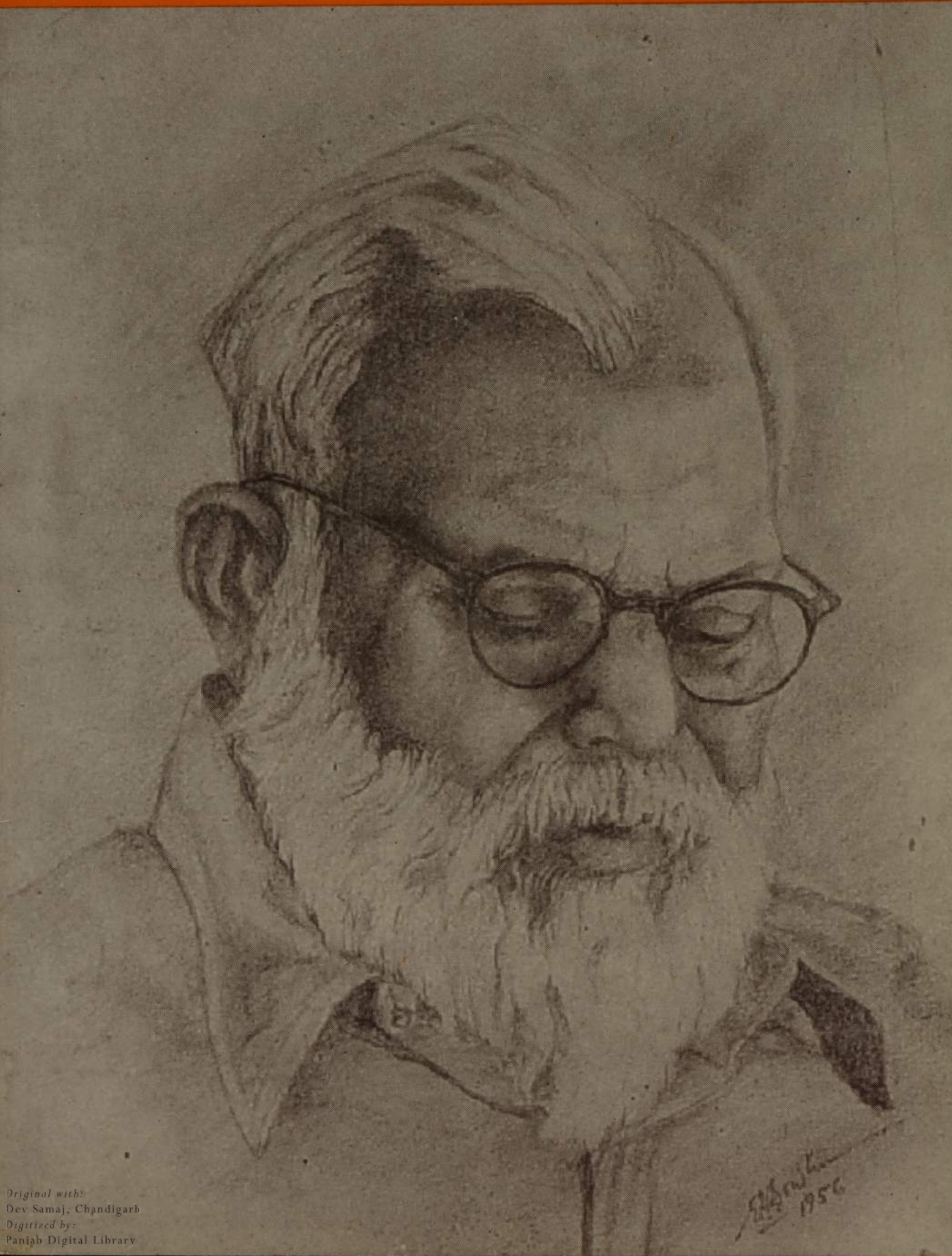


BABAJI

SOME SLIDES FROM HIS LIFE



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By

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BABAJI—SOME SLIDES FROM HIS LIFE
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Preface

I have had the proud privilege of sitting at the feet of Babaji (Revered Principal P.V.Kanal) from 1928 to 1938 - first as a student and then as a member of his staff. During this period I had the opportunity to see him at close quarters. I was witness to many miraculous incidents out of which I have put together just a few. These incidents were actual happenings in his day-to-day life, but I have changed the names of persons involved to avoid embarrassment to them.

Several of his students by their various good qualities, integrity and by the moral instruction imparted by Babaji, have risen very high in life.

I sat at his feet as a student from 1928 to 1932 and then worked under him as the Physical Director and lecturer in Panjabi. I was also the Superintendent of the Hostel and lived on the premises, where I got the chance to work with him at all hours. I often accompanied him on his morning and evening walks. Hence I am very well-acquainted with his life and thoughts.

Babaji was very courteous and considerate, simple, honest and hardworking; compassionate and kind to the weak and extremely generous. He was ever prepared to make any sacrifice for the poor and for mankind and always shunned the rich, the arrogant and the haughty.

He considered it a privilege to do any work with his own hands. Many times he condescended to paste a notice on the notice board or ring the college bell if a peon was not at hand. He would even fill the pitchers of water for the hostel students. When the cook would fall ill, he would request Mataji (Revered Shrimati Saraswati Devi Kanal), endearingly called Bhabiji (Mother) to do the cooking for the hostlers.

Babaji was considerate to every religion and respected the good points in it. That is why everybody — Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims

or Christians — considered him a guide and spiritual leader. They addressed him not as 'Principal Sahib' but as 'Babaji'. And Babaji gave them his parental love in great abundance.

Babaji's '*Niti*' made the students honest, obedient, hardworking and men of character and integrity and thus equipped them to lead a successful life. That is why you meet his students working in different departments and occupations all over the country and they attribute their success and good conduct to the '*Niti*' of Babaji. I have had the chance to personally meet some of his such students among them Inspectors, Superintendents of District Jail, Headmasters and Inspectors of Schools, Army Officers and District Panchayat Officers. Everyone of them has attributed his success to the "*Niti*" conducted by Babaji and hence feels extremely grateful to him.

Kartar Singh

Bawa Sohan Singh was a foreign qualified teacher with a distinguished career as an administrator in Public Education Department in the Punjab. After retirement he became the Principal of a Public School at Dagshai, Himachal Pradesh. He contributed anecdotes from the life of revered Baba ji and wrote a very touching letter narrating in very inspiring manner the favours he had received from Baba ji which was printed in *The Science Grounded Religion* September 1980.

In his forwarding letter, he wrote:

"As a matter of fact, I have not got words eloquent enough to depict graphically my deep sense of gratitude to revered Babaji who lavished so much kindness upon me that I hardly missed my own father who had left us all alone in our early childhood. But for the magnanimity and munificence of Babaji, it would never have been possible to get the higher education and be what I am today. His sympathy and support is thus pervasive in evidence in my life and family."

The incidents recorded by Bawa Sohan Singh would be of interest to the readers of this monograph. So they are given as an appendix.

K.L Vohra

1. Help to the Helpless

It was on a cold December morning in 1934 that I was with Babaji in his office. The sky was overcast with clouds and it was drizzling. The sheering cold winds added to the biting cold.

Babaji saw from his window that a boy was coming to the college in a half-sleeved white cotton shirt with neither a coat nor a sweater. With a few books under his arm he was rushing for his class, though shivering with cold. Babaji asked me to find out as to why he was not wearing anything warm.

I went out and accosted the boy. On enquiry he told me that he was the son of a postman. He had three brothers and two sisters. The father got a salary of just fifteen rupees. What to say of warm clothing, it was hardly possible to get two square meals every day. I advised him to at least cover himself with a bed-sheet to escape the cold and let go the boy.

I reported back to Babaji that the boy was Sharif Ahmed of the second year class and that his poor father had to support a large family with his very meagre income.

Babaji instructed me to take the boy to Swadeshi Store after the college hours and buy him warm cloth and get his coat stitched and that the bill would be paid by Babaji himself.

In the afternoon, I took Sharif Ahmed with me, purchased the cloth and got his coat stitched by Taj Din, tailor, in a couple of days.

2. "She is Losing Sight "

Aziz Ahmed was a very nice, gentle and good student of the second year class. He was the first to come to the class

and would occupy one of the front seats. He used to stand second in his class.

One day he was late for the class by five minutes. He was silent when Babaji asked him the reason for his late coming. He lowered his head and was mute.

Next day, he was late by ten minutes. Babaji rebuked him for his late arrival and remarked, "You have been always punctual in the past, what has happened to you lately? You, should be ashamed of it." The boy was mute even then — he only lowered his gaze and kept standing for some time. It appeared that he was very much ashamed for his lapse.

On the third day, he was late by fifteen minutes. Babaji asked him to stand up and tell him as to what was wrong. The boy did not reply but burst into tears. There was no rebuke, no censure from Babaji this time.

After the class was over, Babaji called me to his office and said, "Akali, Aziz Ahmed of the second year class is a very good student. He had never been late. Now for the last three days he is late every day and when asked he does not give any reason for his late-coming but starts crying and feels very much ashamed. Certainly he has some problem, try to find out as to what is wrong."

I got in touch with the boy, took him out to playground and asked him as to what his difficulty was. He again started crying. I tried to console him and gave him a little affection. He then confided, "My father passed away sometime ago. I have two brothers and two sisters, all younger to me. My mother has eye trouble — she is losing sight. She has been ailing for the last three days. I cook for the family, feed the children and then come to college. This makes me late everyday."

I narrated all this to Babaji. He said, "Akali, you take his mother to Moga Hospital tomorrow. Give my letter to Dr. Mathura Dasji and stay there till her operation. Also request the Superintendent of the Dev Samaj School Hostel to depute

someone to look after the lady and send her meals from the boarding house. I shall foot the bill."

As directed, I took the lady to Moga, next day. The operation was successful and in a few weeks the old lady returned to her house in Basti Kamuanwali, full of gratitude and blessings for Babaji.

3. "*Mai, Go. I Shall Try to Help You*"

In Bansi gate, Ferozeppore there lived a Sikh woman named Harnam Kaur. Her husband died in 1935 leaving behind three sons, the eldest of them was a first year student in Babaji's College, the second was in the 8th class in Santana Dharma School and the youngest was only two years old. Both the elder boys were already getting free education on account of their lack of means. After the death of the father the family was in ruins. They had no other means and after a couple of months there was nothing to subsist on.

One evening Harnam Kaur, aged about 45 years, came to Babaji's house and narrated among sobs the pitiable condition of her household and added, "My son Joginder Singh is studying in your College. He has been getting free education here. After the death of his father, I am not able even to feed the family. I ask him to discontinue his education but he starts crying and insists on continuing. Having heard a lot about your generosity, I have approached you. I shall do even the dish washing, or get me a job in the Dev Samaj Girls' School so that my child can continue his education. I shall be grateful to you till my last breath. I cannot bear the laments of my children and their cries of hunger, with nothing to eat!"

I was present at the feet of Babaji on this occasion. Tears swelled up in his eyes but he kept quiet. After a short pause, he told her, "Mai, go. I shall try to help you."

Next day, Babaji gave me 20 yards of long cloth and instructed me to deliver it at her house for clothing her children. Babaji took it upon himself to provide the family food and clothing

and told Harnam Kaur, "Give up your resolve to work as a maid servant. You look after your children. You will get help in Nature!"

A few years ago, I happened to come across Joginder Singh at Ludhiana Railway Station. He was working as Headmaster of a High School. Both the younger brothers had graduated and employed in Government jobs and the family was doing well, thanks to the timely help by Babaji.

4. Forgiveness

On the 17th May 1935, Babaji was sitting in his office. His face reflected the deep agony of his mind. I enquired as to the cause of his worry because I had never seen him so grief-stricken before.

He replied, "Akali, I am in deep anguish. The boy who is going up and down the road in front of the college gate insulted me in the presence of several students. He shouted at me: Principal Kanal, I will shake the foundations of your College. I damn care for you and your Manager, Lala Govardhan Das.' I, therefore, ordered him to go out of the College and forbade him from entering the College without my permission. Now I am in a fix; whether to write to the University about his misbehaviour and get him rusticated or not. If I rusticate him and ruin his career, it would be against my life-style. If I do not punish him, the discipline of the College is ruined. I am not able to decide one way or the other. Hence I am in deep agony."

We discussed the matter from several angles and finally postponed the decision to the next morning.

At 8 p.m. Babaji went to the dining table for his dinner with his family. He was sad and silent. He was not eating at all. Bhabi ji (Mrs. Saraswati Devi Kanal) asked him the reason for his silence and for not taking his meals. The only reply he gave was : "I don't feel like eating!"

At last, when Babaji did not consent to eat, the whole family discontinued the meals. Mataji called for me to find out as to the cause of Babaji's agony and his refusal to take his meals.

On being pressed further Babaji said, "Akali, I feel that the boy whom I turned out of the College this morning, is in great agony and he has not had his meals. Till he eats, I cannot. If you want me to eat, please send Sunehri peon to his house with my message that I have forgiven him and that he can attend the College as usual."

I directed the peon to go to the residence of Mr. Haq, Session Judge, in the Contonment area and tell his nephew Ghias-ud-Din, second year student of the College, that Babaji had excused his trespass and that he could come to the College.

The peon knocked at the door of the Session Judge's bungalow. An enraged lady came out and asked Sunehri his identity and the purpose of his visit.

Peon : I am a peon at the College.

Lady : What is wrong with Ghias-ud-Din? Ever since he has come back, he is crying and has not come out of his room. He refuses to eat or drink anything nor does he talk.

Peon : I do not know what the matter is. I have been sent just to tell Ghias-ud-Din that Babaji has excused him and that he can come to the College tomorrow.

Lady : What had he done for which he has been excused?

Peon : I don't know anything beyond this.

Lady : All right, you come in and deliver the message to Ghias yourself.

So Sunehri went in and delivered the message to the boy. Hearing the message he got up immediately. The lady again asked, "Son, what is the matter. What has Principal Sahib excused you for?" Ghias-ud-Din replied, "Auntie, today I committed a grave mistake. I was rude and insolent to my god-like Principal. I insulted him. I am extremely ashamed of it. In spite of being a son of such a noble family, I have done something so mean. I was fearing that on learning of my meanness you and respected uncle (the Session Judge) will feel it very much. Hence I was crying. Auntie, look at the nobility of this angel, he has sent a man to tell me that he has pardoned me. By this, I am feeling still more ashamed of my conduct."

"Let us all go just now, son" said the Auntie "and apologize from Babaji".

The Sessions Judge had not yet returned from the club and they waited for him.

Sunehri suggested that since it was quite late, Babaji might have retired. "You can come tomorrow morning. Babaji does no harm to anyone. He treats Ghias-ud-Din like his own children." he added.

Next day, the Sessions Judge accompanied by his wife and Ghias-ud-Din came to Babaji's House. She removed her veil (*burqua*) as soon as she entered his room with folded hands, asked for Babaji's pardon for the insolence of the boy. Ghias-ud-Din fell at Babaji's feet. Babaji lifted him up and took him in his embrace and said, "Son, the question of asking for pardon does not arise because I excused you yesterday itself." Then addressing the Sessions Judge and his wife he added, "He is my own. Children often make such mistakes at this age. Why should you have undergone the trouble of coming all the way?" After this Ghias-ud-Din was one of the best behaved boys of the College.

5. A Thief Does Not Cease to be a Human Being

Every weekend there used to be a lecture by some renowned scholar under the auspices of the Literary Circle. After the lecture, there used to be a dinner in honour of the chief guest.

On one such occasion the dinner ended very late. The servants were busy upto 11.30 p.m. Kundan, one of the peons, was the last to go. While going home he carried away a chair from the college. Hardly had he reached Makhoo Gate, that he was stopped by the clerk of the college who was returning after leaving some guests at their residence. The clerk questioned the peon as to why he was taking away the chair. He had no reply because he had been caught red-handed. He was brought back along with the chair and taken to the Principal's House.

Babaji had just sat for dinner with his family. It was his wont not to eat at the official dinners hosted for the guests but to

take his meals with his family at the end. On hearing the commotion outside, Bhabiji (Mrs.Kanal) came out. She ordered that the matter be entrusted to me for suitable action. When she went in Babaji enquired and came to know of Kundan's misdemeanour.

Babaji atonce got up and came out with his plate full of the meals. I had reached the spot at that time. Addressing me he quoth, "Akali, Kundan had been on duty since long. He has not had anything to eat so far. Take this plate and let him eat. Then you go into the question of the theft of the chair."

Because of more than anticipated number of guests at the dinner, very little of the food was left. That plate was all that came to Babaji's share, and that he had given for Kundan. Bhabiji was very much upset at this and said, "Sain,* what are you doing! He has committed theft and you are giving him your own share of the food! What will you have?"

"Sain," spoke the Sage, "the poor man has been working since morning. He must be very hungry. Seeing him hungry and then handing him over to Akali, I cannot eat!" So saying he saw to it that Kundan took the food and then directed me to go and take rest and postpone the enquiry to the next morning.

6. His Radiant Love

The members of his staff and the students never referred to him as "Principal Sahib" but as "Babaji". He treated them all as affectionately as his own children. He was always approachable and ready to solve any difficulty any of them might be facing. Of course, he was firm with those who did something wrong. His rebuke or punishment was always such as a father gives to his own son or daughter.

Ram Kishan, a student, was the son of a local Magistrate First Class. He was very mischievous. On mild warnings he failed to mend his ways. Thereupon Babaji expressed his annoyance to him in no uncertain terms. The boy did not bear

* 'Sain' in Sindhi is equivalent to 'Janab' in urdu (Sir/Madam)

it. On reaching home he told his Magistrate father that the Principal was unduly harrassing him. He added a few false accusations also.

Next morning, the Magistrate and his wife drove to the college in full rage. He sent in his visiting card. Babaji was addressing a class, so he directed me to take them to the guest room so that he could meet them after that period.

At the end of the period, Babaji came there and narrated the boy's pranks and mischiefs. Hearing that, the father said, "Sir, we have entrusted the boy to your care. You have to set him right. Treat him as firmly as you want to. Twist his ears hard, but make a man out of him."

Babaji replied, "Certainly, I shall do it. But it was just a little reprimand which was resulted in your coming here to take me to task!"

Upon this, the Magistrate and his wife both stood up, folded their hands in reverence and said, "Sir, we are very much ashamed of this. We apologize. Whatever you have done is for the good of our son." Hearing this Ram Kishan fell at Babaji's feet and said, "Pray, excuse me this time. Never again shall I give you a chance to complain."

7. For His Staff,

Maulvi Sahib was the Urdu Teacher. He was always hard up and was usually in poor health. Once he fell seriously ill and was bed-ridden for several months. He had consumed all the leave he was entitled to, according to the rules. Now he was either to join his duties or take leave without pay. Babaji knew that the Maulvi Sahib could neither join duties not exist without his salary.

Babaji hired a tonga, at his own expense, to bring the Maulvi Sahib from his house to the College and take him back to his house. And so it happened. The Maulvi Sahib used to come in the tonga, signed the register while still in the tonga and returned home immediately in the same tonga.

So far the classes were concerned, the Sage made arrangement with a competent local gentleman who had immense reverence for him. He taught Urdu to the classes for the month when the Maulvi Sahib was incapacitated. The Maulvi Sahib was ever grateful for this considerateness and help.

8. His Discipline of Love

In his entire career as head of educational institutions, Babaji never fined a student, nor did he ever have to punish a subordinate. Yet his institutions had superb discipline. He ran the college with love and not with the wand of authority nor with brutal force. The college was a large family and Babaji was its head. Every visitor — distinguished or ordinary — appreciated and lauded this family atmosphere. Often it was said that Ram Sukh Dass College was the Santiniketan of the Punjab.

A few local politicians — Communists, Congressites and others — as also trade unionists and practitioners of local yellow journalism, had grievances against the Founder-Manager of the College and his brothers. Some felt jealous of the good reputation of the College.

Once these elements combined and started a strike and picketting at the College gate. They put forward some baseless demands and were bent upon harming the College.

One day two hours before the College time, there collected some hirelings and started shouting slogans: "*Inqlab Zindabad*" (long live revolution) R.S.D. College *Muradabad* (Down with R.S.D. College) 'Fulfil our Demands' etc. In spite of all this, the students came to the College and the classes were held as usual.

The next day the agitators started a strict picketting. Some lay on the ground in front of the College gate and thus barred the passage, making it impossible for anyone to get in. As the time of the opening of the College approached, some of

the bigger boys scaled the high boundary wall and physically lifted the smaller boys to help them to climb up the wall and enter the College. Some others used a ladder they had brought from somewhere.

The correspondents of some newspapers approached Babaji for a statement. Babaji refused to oblige and only remarked that all was well in his household, i.e. the College. To another question as to the attendance in the classes, Babaji replied that there was no need to ask him about the attendance and they could go to the classes and see it for themselves and also to compare it with the attendance registers of earlier days. The news-hawks went in, saw that the classes were functioning with good attendance, compared it with the record of earlier days in the registers and reached the conclusion that the attendance was 15% more in the two days of the strike, than it was earlier. They were astonished and again came to Babaji and asked him the reason for this improvement in attendance during the strike period. His only reply was: "Why do you ask me? The boys would be able to tell you better!" They went back to the students and asked them the reason for better attendance. In every class the reply was that ordinarily they did not care for the classes and absented themselves even on the smallest pretext. "But during these days how can we be absent — it is a question of the honour and prestige of 'Our Babaji' ." The correspondents were much amazed and next day a report appeared in a newspaper that not only in the Punjab but in the whole of India R.S.D College is the only College where attendance improved by 15% during the days of strike.

This newspaper report and other incidents showing the solidarity of the college family, broke the back of the agitation. When they could not entice even a single student from the College, they ran to Lahore to seek help from the President of the Provincial Students' Union. The latter came by the morning train with a few students from Lahore colleges as 'volunteers' and started the picketting at the College gate. On

the request of the Union President when Babaji was about to go out of the College gate to meet him, the boys stopped him and said, "Babaji please be seated in your office. If the Union leader wants he can meet you there. The people outside are not in their senses. If any one says or does something derogatory to your honour, we will not be able to bear it and that will further complicate the matter. So kindly remain in your office only. And before he meets you, we would go out and meet him." So saying, some twenty or so boys went out and asked the boys from Lahore, the reason of their coming there. They replied that they had come "to help your cause and get proper redress of your grievances". Our boys said, "We have absolutely no difficulty. It is just the mechanization of a few local disgruntled persons. Please go back." They refused to leave but started shouting offensive slogans. Our boys pushed them back and made it impossible for them to stay on. Thereafter, there was neither any strike nor picketting.

This was the college discipline of Babaji.

9. Secularism

Darshan Singh was a 1st year student. He was a very hard working, honest, obedient and decent boy. Babaji was very much impressed by his sincerity and honesty. He felt that given an opportunity he could be very useful to the College.

In 1932 when the University of the Panjab made physical education compulsory in its colleges, Babaji recommended to the College Committee to sponsor Darshan Singh for training in Physical Education at Madras. A meeting was scheduled a couple of days before the day the candidate was required to leave for Madras. There was heated discussion in the meeting. The Committee desired that a Dev Samajist be sent up because the College was affiliated to the Samaj and got considerable help from it. Babaji, himself a top light of Dev Samaj, opined that it was wrong to decide the issue on the basis of creed or religion. "I value honesty and integrity. I feel Darshan Singh

will prove more useful to the College and hence I want him to be sponsored." The entire Committee was opposed to this. Hence it was decided that Darshan Singh should not be sent.

Babaji felt deeply hurt but he bore the shock with silence. The meeting had just ended when Lala Ram Lal, Advocate, a prominent member of the Committee arrived. He had not been able to come on time, on account of another appointment. He had deep reverence and respect for Babaji and highly valued his high moral principles.

Immediately on entering, he enquired as to the decision about sponsoring the candidate for Madras training. Babaji said that what the Committee desired had been decided. "Darshan Singh is not being sent in spite of my strongest recommendation." Lala Ram Lal addressed the members of the Committee and said, "You have not taken a right decision. We should not go against the wishes of Babaji because he knows better about the affairs of the College. We should, therefore, sponsor only Darshan Singh for training at Madras and also appoint him as the Physical Director thereafter." The entire Committee decided to reverse its earlier decision and Darshan Singh was duly sponsored.

Babaji was naturally very happy. Time proved that he was right because when, after training, Darshan Singh joined the College, he proved an asset to the Institution. He did so much and so well for over seven years of his stay at the College that the members of the Committee felt that Babaji was right in his judgement and that it would have been wrong to have decided otherwise.

10. Reverence for 'Bhakti Bhav'

There was a very good boy named Prem Singh of Faridkote, who was a student of the 3rd year. He was a very well-behaved and nice student of a religious bent of mind. Every day he would get up early in the morning and after bath etc. would sit in a beautiful lawn opposite Babaji's

bungalow and read the scriptural texts of his religion. Babaji used to see him doing all this every day as he went out for his morning walk.

One day I also happened to be with Babaji when he suddenly stopped and started looking at Prem Singh who was so engrossed in his religious exercise that he was oblivious to Babaji's passing by him or standing and watching him. After staying there for a short while, the Sage (Babaji) offered him '*Pranam*' and went his way for his walk.

I ventured to ask Babaji as to why he had saluted an ordinary student like that. "I like the boy very much". "How is it, Babaji, that you like this boy?" I persisted, "He is a Sikh and is reading the *Gurubani*, that is he is reciting God's name. And you are such a top-light of Dev Samaj and do not believe in God at all. Then how and why do you admire this boy doing God-worship?"

Babaji's reply was typical of him. Said he, "Akali, you do not know that Dev Dharma is not a religion in the ordinary sense of the word. It is a religion which values truth and goodness and regards it its duty to show the way of goodness and truth to all. Scent whether in a phial or a bottle or even in a '*lota*' will always give fragrance and everyone will like the sweet smell! Similarly, virtues of truthfulness and goodness, whether in a Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or Christian, are lovable. I value the *Bhakti Bhav* in Prem Singh which impels him to do his religious exercises and therefore, offer him my respects. Yes, it is true that I value and love Dev Samaj more than my life, but it does not mean that I should not value one who is not a Dev Samajist. I can't help admiring these basic values wherever I find them. I have not saluted the boy but the resplendant virtue of *Bhakti* in him".

11. His Reverence for Women

Babaji respected womankind very much. Respect for the fair sex had developed in him so much that he would address

every woman, be she of 50 years or only five, as 'Mai'(Mother).

One evening Babaji and I went up to the embankment of the river Sutlej and beyond. There he saw a Harijan woman with a small child in her lap, collecting fuel wood from the fields. She was about 300 yards away. Seeing her Babaji stopped and bowed in respect of her. I inquired, "Babaji, why have you made obeisance to a poor Harijan woman?" The Sage replied, "Akali, you do not know how I revere womankind! Every woman is a monument of selfless service. Look at this woman. She is carrying the child in her lap. She is giving so much love and service to him. She feeds him on her own milk, cleans its clothes full of excreta. She looks after all his basic needs of food, clothing and sleep. In cold wintry nights she herself sleeps on the wet side but makes him sleep on the dry side of the bed to avoid the child feeling cold. In a nutshell woman sacrifices every comfort of her own for the child. When I look to the whole world I do not find any one as serviceable as a woman. So, for the womankind, what to say of just obeisance, I would consider it a privilege to sacrifice my life".

12. He Belonged to Everyone

Babaji's was a wonderful personality. He valued human beings and valued and served them as such. Especially he considered it his foremost duty to be of service to the needy and the good.

He never could see the demarcating boundaries of creeds and faiths. He never differentiated between a Hindu, a Sikh, a Muslim or a Christian. He valued virtues anywhere. That is why the pious Muslims of Ferozepore, Kasur etc. considered him their '*pir*' (religious leader) and Hindus and Sikhs felt proud to consider him as their guide and leader. Christian boys and girls considered him a soul sublime and adored him.

Just a couple years ago, I happened to meet Mr. Eric Massih, an old student of Babaji, who is at present an Inspector of Police. During conversation he said, "What we learnt at

the feet of Babaji has been of so much value throughout life." Pointing to the constables under him, he continued, "Ask anyone of them, I have never accepted any bribes even being in the Police Department, nor have I ever touched liquor. All this is a miracle of Babaji's moral instruction!"

People of all creeds and religions, be they students, teachers or administrative helpers, valued Babaji as their own elder — a father figure.

I have had the privilege of being at his feet from 1928 to 1938. I witnessed during this entire period that boys and girls of every religion were his pupils. Every one drank from the same pitchers. There was no separate arrangement for either Hindus or Muslims as was the custom those days. There was only one common kitchen for all communities where every one ate at the same table. This was unique and miraculous in those times. On his staff were Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and all lived like brothers and members of the same family.

Not only was Babaji a complete man, he was an angel to whom people of all religions looked as their own guide. *He truly belonged to everyone.*

Appendix

Babaji — As I Saw Him

By Bawa Sohan Singh

After having done my matriculation in 1930, I had the good luck to get into contact with Babaji, who, to be brief, was a real angel in human form, a tall, towering personality, his face verily aglow with devine halo

Such an enlightened and liberated was Babaji's personality that it virtually beggars description. Once, a Muslim District & Session Judge, posted at Ferozepore remarked publicly in the College that though Babaji was non-believer in God, yet the inspiring effuglence on his angelic face, makes it very hard to believe it to be so. I remember quite vividly the broad and bland smile, given by Babaji, quite unassumingly, to this observation which had surged up from the core of a staunch Muslim dignitary.

Having lost my father in early childhood, I was, without any pull and pressure, like rudderless ship rolling sickly in the buffeting waves of the stormy ocean. It was just like standing at the cross-roads feeling at my wits' end to forge ahead.

As my elder brother was already studying in the R.S.D. College, Ferozepore, of which Babaji was the Principal, my widowed-mother took me for admission to Babaji who knew fully well that I was financially too weak to pay fees etc., and buy my text-books even. It was highly gracious of Babaji to accept me as a free student all round. Directions for the supply of free books and stationery were given immediately to Mr. Babu Ramji, who was the office clerk at that time.

Emboldened by the affectionate looks of Babaji, I insisted on having absolutely new text books in contra-distinction to the second hand books. Presumptuous as it was on the face of it,

like a beggar being choosy, Babaji didn't like to disappoint me.

In one of the house examinations, I once had attempted my paper in philosophy which Babaji used to teach so effectively, in indigenous black ink as on the eve of this examination my blue ink-pot had fallen down and broken. The hard-pressed mother regretted her inability to give me one pice even for purchasing the ordinary blue-ink tablets. In a huff, I laid hand upon the earthen black ink-pot of my youngest brother and did my paper.

After marking, the scripts were being returned by Babaji, when his eyes fell upon my answer-book, written in black ink. As I stood luckily first in that paper, Babaji was good enough to hail it as good attempt.

After some time I was summoned in the office and asked the reason of having used black ink. As I was explaining the fact in my own innocent naive way, I noticed the streak of tears in Babaji's eyes, soaked with compassion. That was indeed a stirring spectacle of a noble soul, melting all out in sympathy with a folorn chap.

Things went on and I passed the Intermediate Examination with the grim prospect of my education being again cut short since the R.S.D. College, Ferozepore, was till then only upto F.A. No sooner had I done my F.A. than the degree classes were sanctioned by the Panjab University, Lahore, to be added. I was in the first batch. My elective subject was Maths: A & B courses. Once the time table of my class was set in such a way that I couldn't attend my periods in Maths, as I had to do tuition work for my subsistence from 8.00 a.m. to 10.00 a.m. besides another round in the evening.

After having missed my period in Maths for 2/3 days, I went to Babaji at his residence just as a son can, with mind at ease, walk into one's parents' house. He was having his lunch. I tried to dodge for not disturbing him at such an odd hour but having sighted me, Babaji called me in and asked me what had brought me to him. I looked distraught and despaired, after having told him my baffling problem. In a trice, Babaji's blessed hand was on my back and I was assured of the desired change in the

time table which had been in progress hardly for a few days. Prof. Des Raj who was our respected Maths teacher and Vice-Principal as well, couldn't relish the abrupt change in the time table. Babaji said to him in my presence, "Well, it may cause some inconvenience to you but on the other hand, it is the question of earning his livelihood by a young man. I hope you would very kindly see your way to relieve the exigency of the boy's problem."

To overhaul the time table for the sake of a non-descript, indigent student is not a small gesture. It speaks volumes of the milk of human kindness with which the silken heart of Babaji was imbued and soaked in.

One fine morning in Summer, 1933, Babaji asked me an embarrassing question while I was then in 3rd year degree course class. He asked me what breakfast I used to have in the morning before coming to the college. Since I couldn't afford this luxury on account of meagre resources, I, in my usual outspoken way told him that I had only lunch at about 1.00 p.m. or near about after attending my classes in the college and moreover I never had felt the pangs of hunger etc., to make me feel miserable. The reply, un-varnished and un-sophisticated as it was, evoked visible strong emotion in the tender heart of Babaji who looked aghast though I stood the ground absolutely unmoved since I never felt anything missed in the absence of the so called breakfast. He lost no time in summoning the proprietor of the college tuck-shop whose name was perhaps Mr. Ram Nath, and instructed him to give me a glassful of '*lassi*' of or quarter seer curds daily. My conscience, however, did not reconcile to this unnecessary tax upon Babaji's generosity and I told him like-wise, quite plainly, though gratefully, not to worry about me on that count, his persuasion and coaxing notwithstanding.

Once in winter, during my college days in the R.S.D. College, Ferozepore City, Babaji on a rainy and rough day, saw me in shirt only, thinking that I had perhaps no woollen to ward off the biting cold. I had, in fact, one pull-over, torn and ragged of course, worn underneath my shirt. Babaji took me to his residence, without any inkling on my part, and offered me his black-striped woollen suit which took me aback. Babaji, by the

curves and contours of his well-built body, was quite tall, and broad shouldered whereas I was quite lean and lanky. I, with amused surprise, told Babaji that the coat could hardly fit in, on my shoulders and regarding pants, I was by then, not used to wear because my dress till late in life consisted of shirt and pyjama with '*desi*' shoes. In deference to Babaji's wishes, I had to accept the coat which was later on, trimmed to my size. Despite my telling him protestingly that I too had purchased a coat from the rags which was with the tailor for re-processing, I couldn't get off without yielding gratefully to the kind offer which I caught hold of as '*prashad*'.

That Babaji had charity for all and malice for none, can no better be illustrated than an episode within my remembrance. There was a class-mate of mine, named Mewa Singh. He while playing hockey lost his temper with Babaji's son, Veer, immediately younger to Kakaji and hurled dirty abuses upon him, in his wild fit. All of us who were present there on the field, were grimly astounded and instinctively thought that he (Mewa Singh) was sure to be expelled for his indecorous behaviour but nothing of this sort transpired since Mewa Singh after cooling down, felt contrite and guilty. He went straight to Babaji and apologized in a very humble and dejected mood. His forlorn and fallen face moved the tender heart of Babaji who rather exhorted him to keep his temper on short lease.

After my graduation, Babaji encouraged me to prepare for some competitive examination. For this purpose I was referred by Babaji, to one gentleman, S. Gurbux Singh, who was then the Income Tax Officer at Ferozepore, for guidance. However all my hopes were dashed and shattered on the discovery of a silly mistake in the date of my birth according to which I, funnily enough turned out to be elder to my elder brother by more than one year. This wrong date of birth denied me opportunity to the competitive examination. Babaji consoled me, drafted a petition like a legal adviser, addressed to then Registrar of the Panjab University, Shri Ishwar Dass, who happened to be a close friend of L. Jagan Nath Syal of Ferozepore who was also requested by Babaji to help me. But nothing came of this efforts of Babaji.

Roaming about in the gloomy corridors of dismay and despair and without any material resources to prosecute my further studies, I pressed, rather pestered Babaji to my great shame and remorse now, to help me do law which he didn't approve of, my remonstrances notwithstanding.

It may be mentioned in passing that I have no regret in being unable to show my mettle as a lawyer because I have found '*joie-de-vivre*' and a sense of fulfilment in working as a teacher trying to achieve as much success as possible by means of diligence. Though I have worked mostly on the inspecting side of the Education Department, I feel myself more as a teacher than as an administrator.

However, once caught miserably in the tentacles of desperation and pessimism, I unwittingly trod upon the toes of Babaji, making unveiled hint that I was being meted out discriminatory treatment vis-a-vis his own children. It was manifestly egregious folly on my part to be so unabashedly rude and cheeky. But so profound was the imperturbability and mental composure of that great saint and savant, that he took me actually in his affectionate hug and said consolingly, "You are undoubtedly as dear as any one of my children. Don't let yourself be thrown out of gear. Very shortly you will feel a miraculous change in your career". He had such a clairvoyance, besides being a palmist par excellence and physiogomyst that it was not a difficult problem for him to look into the future of a person. Whenever I stumbled and slipped into the slough of despondency, I used to go to Babaji without any let and hinderance and sitting by his side was wonderfully soothing. Such were the spiritual emanations of good cheers from the sacred body of that *Rishi*, Kanalji.

I am re-living in the distant past by recapitulating these sharp reminiscences, wondering at the same time how, despite being a small fry as compared to the mental, moral and spiritual gigantic dimensions of Babaji, I could attract his benign consideration and affection. There are others in legions who were fortunate enough to be blessed by Babaji, like myself.

(SGR 9/1980)

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