

Quest for the search of Kalgis belonging to Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji

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Researched and written

by



NATIONAL SIKH
HERITAGE CENTRE
&
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Executive Summary

This report has been specifically prepared to present a high-level summary to the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) on the research which is currently being undertaken by the National Sikh Heritage Centre & Holocaust Museum (NSHC&HM), Derby, UK. To locate the missing Shaster and Kalgi of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

We are very concerned in the UK at the levels of duplication and misinformation currently being published within the international media.

We hope that this report will assist the Committee in its deliberations and would welcome any comments to guide our work and would willingly act under the direction of the committee on behalf of the Panth. We would also welcome people that the Committee nominates to work on this endeavour.

1 Background

The Kalgi symbolically represents Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji and the Sovereignty of the Khalsa. Hence the search for the known Kalgi is nothing less than a Panthic quest. Similarly, the shastars of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji represent the struggle for justice and rights. Therefore the search for the missing shasters symbolises the ongoing struggle to create conditions for the Khalsa to be able to flourish and coexist peacefully with others in an increasingly diverse and interdependent world.

It is reasonable to assume that during his life-time due to ordinary wear and tear, weathering, battles, gifts etc he would have owned and worn a number of Kalgis. However, there is very limited recorded evidence as to how many Kalgis, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji actually had during his lifetime or the location of any of these Kalgis or what they looked like.

In the last few years there have been several stories postulated in order to explain origins of specific Kalgis and trying to present these as Kalgis belonging to Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji. However, each one of these stories has not been substantiated with accurate, watertight source based evidence.

The purpose of this report is to share the findings of our research to date on this subject within the context of the recent events.

2 What did the Kalgis of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji look like?

Kalgis have long been associated with South-East Asian royalty as well as with the Sikh Gurus. There are literally hundreds of examples of Kalgis around the world that belonged to various Maharajahs, Rajahs and Sardars.

In the older artist impressions of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji the Kalgis are often shown with black plumes (very likely to be hawk feathers). It should be noted that most of these paintings were painted in the late 1700s, some 70 years after Guru Ji had passed away and therefore do not necessarily represent reality or historical accuracy.

We do know that Bahadur Shah at his coronation presented a Kalgi to Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji as nazrana (tribute). This Kalgi is described in Persian as, Dhukhdhuki and was possibly jeweled.

From the writings of Sainapati, we can also determine that Guru Ji had jeweled Kalgis.

Research has uncovered descriptions of the Kalgi in possession of the British:

- a) A Kalgi taken by the British from the Lahore Fort is described in the Urzee (12th September 1851) from the treasurer, Rae Misr Meghraj as:

"Kulghee-i-Kuch (a crest of glass in a silver case)".

- b) In the list of items loaned by Lord Dalhousie's son-in-law, W.H.Broun, to the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum, UK, (9th June 1898) the following is stated:

"Sikh Priest's Kulgee (Gooroo's) - gold handle with Egrets Plume in a silver case decorated with flowers (plume loose), (case dented).

These descriptions are considered to be of the same Kalgi and the analysis are as below:

An Egret is a type of heron bird with long white feathers. Therefore the Kalgi had white feathers held in a gold handle. It is also worth noting that the word 'aigrette' or 'aigret' is often confused with the word 'egret'.

The word aigret can also mean 'jewellery' in imitation of a plume of feathers. So it is possible that the Kalgi was made of glass with the plume also being made of glass only. It may be that it also had with a single large Egrets plume (with or without some smaller feathers) as part of the design.

From both of these descriptions it is not clear how the glass was used in the construction the Kalgi or whether they are even descriptions of the same Kalgi.

However, glass could have been used in a Kalgi of Guru Ji as glass did exist in India and trade between India and Europe was well established by late the 1680s. There Italian and French glass craft had evolved to a point that plume type shapes were definitely possible.

In conclusion it is probable that this was a Kalgi with plumes made of glass and it had a gold holder for the long white plume. It may have been a construction from European designed and shaped glass with Indian construction as a kalgi by a jeweler.

3 Claims made in relation to the Kalgi of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji

The following section will take some commonly postulated stories and analyze whether there is any thing of substance in them.



a. Kalgi given to Bhai Sangat Singh

Claim

That Guru Ji gave a Kalgi to Bhai Sangat Singh when he left Chamkur Sahib in December 1705. There is a remote possibility that the Moguls and the Hill Chiefs who eventually overran the field may have found and taken a Kalgi as a memento or as a proof of having killed Guru Ji. It is postulated that this Kalgi ended up with Wazir Khan the Governor of Sarhind, who then gave it to Bahadur Shah who lost it to Abdali when he looted Delhi. Eventually Maharajah Ranjeet Singh acquired it from the Afghans through Shah Shuja.

Evidence available

It is widely accepted by the Panth that Guru Ji did indeed tie a Kalgi on Bhai Sangat Singh Ji. The main problem with this story is that Wazir Khan never met Bahadur Shah after he became Emperor. It is doubtful that even if he was in possession of Guru Ji's Kalgi that he would have sent it to Auranzeb or Bahadur Shah given that he was utterly humiliated in battle. An important fact of the siege of Anandpur Sahib and the battle at Chamkur is that Guru Ji had managed to escape and survive them. The Governor of Sarhind, Wazir Khan was also very fearful of the friendly relationship between Guru Ji and Bahadur Shah and knew that he could potentially be held to account as was Chandu Shah during the time of Sri Guru Hargobind Ji.

In any event, if Wazir Khan had held on to the Kalgi, then Banda Singh Bahadur would have acquired it after the capture of Sarhind. Banda Singh Ji's power would have increased even more if the Khalsa knew that the Kalgi of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji was in his possession. It is highly likely that Banda Singh Ji would have let this fact be widely known especially when he was facing difficulties. There is no recorded evidence of Banda Singh Ji ever having Guru Ji's Kalgi in his possession.



b. Kalgi given to Maharajah Ranjit Singh

Claim

That Maharajah Ranjeet Singh had acquired a Kalgi from a relative of Guru Nanak Dev Ji.

Evidence available

In a document dated 12th September 1851 written by Sd.P.Melville (Secretary Board of Administration, Lahore) for the benefit of Major G.H.MacGregor, C.B. (Deputy Commissioner, In-charge of Citadel Establishments) it is clearly stated by Rae Misr Meghraj that,

“Kulghee-i-Kutch (A crest of glass in a silver case). A Sahibzada (descendant of Nanak) of Vyrowal brought this to M.R.Runjeet Singh on 7th Chet 1881 (1824 A.D.)”

Maharajah Ranjeet Singh believed for this Kalgi to be that of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji. This Kalgi along with Shasters of the Gurus were treated with a great deal of respect with Maharajah Ranjeet Singh paying homage to them almost on a daily basis. This Kalgi is believed to have ended up with Lord Dalhousie and the one being searched for.



c. Kalgi is passed between Lord Dalhousie, Princess Bamba Duleep Singh and Pir Karim Supra

Claim

Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji’s Kalgi was taken from Fort Toshakana, Lahore in 1849 and brought to the UK by Lord Dalhousie. The Kalgi was then eventually returned by descendants of Lord Dalhousie to the descendants of Maharajah Duleep Singh. The postulation then goes on to suggest that the Kalgi – along with other items – was taken to Lahore by Maharajah Duleep Singh’s daughter, Princess Bamba. In 1957, Princess Bamba Duleep Singh died leaving her entire estate to Pir Karim Bakhsh Supra.

It is claimed that a collector purchased the Kalgi from the descendant of Pir Karim Bakhsh Supra in the late 1990’s.

Evidence available

However, research has shown that this claim to be of a dubious nature.

The Her Last Will and Testament reads:

“I bequeath my movable and immovable property to Karim Baksh Supra in grateful recognition of his faithful and devoted service and kindness to me during the last 61 years. He shall become the full owner of all the immovable property with the full power to deal with any of it in any way he likes as a full owner, including my house comprising plot No. 103 and 104, situated in the block Model Town, Lahore. Likewise, he will become the owner of all the movable property of any description in all the

three countries of Pakistan, Republic of India and the United Kingdom belonging to me or found belonging to me."

It is known that Pir Supra sold a collection to the Government of Pakistan consisting of: 18 oil paintings; 14 water colours; 22 Ivory paintings; 17 photographs; 10 metallic objects; and 7 miscellaneous articles. These objects are now on display at the Lahore Fort. There is no record of a Kalgi of any type in the official records for this collection – full list of the items is readily available.

Following the death of Pir Supra his estate (which included the remains of Princess Bamba Duleep Singh estate) was divided between eight of Pir Supra's descendants. Today only five survive: Akbar, Pir Muhammad Akram, Aslam Pirzada, Afzal and Muhammad Anwar Pirzada. Recent conversations between the NSHC&HM and descendants of Pir Supra confirm that they have never been in possession of any Kalgi.

A variation of this story also is that an ancestor of Jassa Singh Ramgahria called Hari Dass Singh (Echogill) got the Kalgi from Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji and over the years it passed through the family and eventually Sardar Jodh Singh gave it to Maharajah Ranjeet Singh. Then Maharajah Duleep Singh took it with him to England. His daughter Princess Bamba Duleep Singh took it back to Lahore and upon her death gave it to Pir Supra, whose family sold it to a collector from UK. As stated above there is simply no evidence of this and at best it appears to be an attempt to pass on a particular Kalgi as being genuine.

Others:

It is alleged that Maharajah Duleep Singh had presented three Kalgis studded with pearls along with ten other items to the Prince of Wales. However, the origins of these three Kalgis and their current whereabouts is unknown. Further research is needed to establish the full facts of this assertion.

The location and history of the Kalgis belonging to Maharajah Ranjeet Singh and Maharajah Duleep Singh, which are often displayed in paintings of them requires further research.

Claims such as Kalgi of other sons of Maharajah Ranjeet Singh being in UK also need substantiating with evidence.

It is also known that seven auctions took place during December of 1850 in Lahore to dispose of items of Sikh heritage and from the Sikh Raj. The authors of this report have been able to determine that these auctions were organised by Messrs Lattie brothers of Hays-on-Wyes. If their catalogues and records can be traced then they may shed new light on the whereabouts of the Kalgis and other heritage items.



Claim

d. Kalgi gifted to Mata Sundri Ji

That a Kalgi was gifted to the Mata Sundri Ji.

Evidence available

When Guru Ji passed away at Hazoor Sahib, it is reasonable to assume that a Kalgi would have been cremated with him. What happened to any of the other Kalgis belonging to Guru Ji is unclear. There is evidence that Mata Sundri Ji, who was living in Delhi at the time Guru Ji's passed away, was in possession of a number of articles belonging to the Guru. However, there is no reference to any Kalgis in records available from that time. Further research is needed to establish if any of Guru Ji's Kalgis were gifted to Singh's at Sri Hazoor Sahib in 1708 or by Mata Sundri Ji in later years.



e. Kalgis located at the Crown and Crests Museum in Bath City, South Wales

Claim

Five Kalgis are located at the Crown and Crests Museum in Bath City, South Wales.

Evidence available

There are a number of flaws with this postulation. Firstly, Bath City in the UK is in England and not Wales. Secondly there is no Bath City in New South Wales, Australia. There is a possibility that the Museum exists, it may have a different name or location. This needs further research.

However, there are several Kalgis from the Indian Subcontinent at Victoria and Albert Museum but none of these have a Sikh connection. Almost a global research is needed to ascertain what Kalgis different museums hold.

4 Search for the Kalgi

The last known whereabouts of the Kalgi taken from the Lahore Fort by Lord Dalhousie in 1849 is that it was lent to the V&A Museum on 9th June 1898 and returned to Lord Dalhousie's son-in-law W.H. Broun on 20th July 1898.

The Dalhousie family held auctions at Dowell's Rooms in Edinburgh for several days between 28th September and 10th December 1898, disposing off great chunks of Lord Dalhousie's collection (who had died on 19th Dec 1860). A number of items with Sikh connections were sold, some of which were sold by private treaty. Sketchy lists of the items sold are available from the Edinburgh Archives but there is no reference of any Kalgi within these lists.

The authors of this report have been made aware that the full catalogue of these auctions may be available within the US libraries – this needs further research. Records of these auctions and possibly other private sales may clarify and confirm whether a Kalgi was sold and if so, what happened to the Kalgi.

It is also known that Maharajah Duleep Singh also held several auctions in his attempts to return to Panjab. There is no record of any Kalgi's being sold or even of Maharani Jindan being in possession of any Kalgi when she came to England.

For many years now, scholars and amateur enthusiasts have been exploring the Sikh Heritage in Britain. This is a success story in that there have been notable achievements by organisations such as Sikh Community and Youth Services (SCYS), Nottingham who laid foundations with pioneering work in the 1980s. Since then the Anglo-Sikh Heritage under the stewardship of Sardar H.S Rana has done some sterling work to link all places of Sikh Heritage into a single Sikh Heritage Trail. Some young writers such as Peter Bance, Amandeep Singh Madra and Parmjit Singh have published some very well researched books based mainly on sources of Sikh history in Britain. The work of Dr Channan Singh Chan as a collector in this regard over very many years is widely known. However, none of these works have to date uncovered anything substantial in relation to the missing weapons and the Kalgi of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

In fact there remains a serious gap in research even in relation to other Kalgis with a Sikh connection. For the past month the issue of the Kalgi has received world media attention and yet no one has come forward with anything, not even a possible trail. One can only conclude that at this moment in time the research has drawn a blank.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

Over the years there have been a number of different people who claim to know the whereabouts or possess Kalgis belonging to Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji. However, it is clear from the research and investigations to date and summarised within this report, there is no reliable evidence available to substantiate any of these claims. It is therefore, the conclusion of the authors that at this moment in time it can not be said with any degree of confidence as to which is the best line of enquiry to follow.

However through investigation and research, a number of avenues have been uncovered which require further investigation. It is recommended that these avenues be fully investigated and researched in order to bring conclusion to these postulations and to determine whether there are any Kalgis belonging to Guru Ji still in existence.

Aspects which require further investigations include:

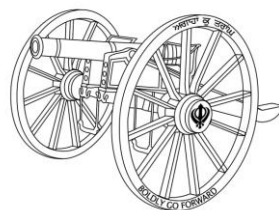
1. Investigation into the story about the Kalgi being taken to Middle East in 1990/91.

2. Investigation into the auction and sale of the estate belonging to Lord Dalhousie which took place in 1898. This includes locating the complete records of the auction.
3. Investigation into whether Mata Sundri Ji was ever in possession of Guru Ji's Kalgi and if so, what happened to it.
4. Investigation into what happened to Guru Ji's possessions at Sri Hazoor Sahib in 1708.
5. Investigation to establish the whereabouts of, the history and the origins of Kalgis belonging to Maharajah Ranjeet Singh , Maharajah Duleep Singh and other notable Sardars.
6. Further research needs to be conducted to establish the location of all of the different Kalgis in various museums and their history and origins.

It is important not to duplicate effort and to keep going to the same sources for the same information. Not only does this waste time and money but it also annoys the institutions. We also need to openly share findings .This may be the key reason why we have not much progress so far.

In this report we have sought to identify some of the lines of enquiry that are being pursued and those which have proven to be dead-ends. We will be creating an official web site shortly on which we will publish all our research findings and supporting documents for any researcher to access and develop the research further. This facility will be extended to cover other Kalgis of Sikh origin if appropriate. We welcome anyone who wishes to join this virtual team on a journey of discovery on behalf of the Khalsa Panth.

Further Information



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